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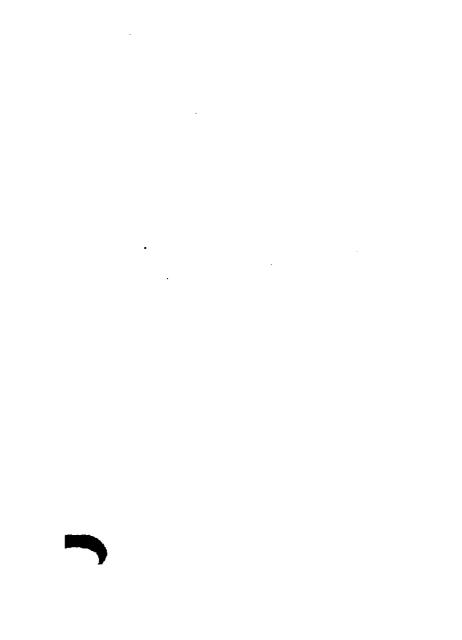
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"Tom bade her good-bye."-P. 25.

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OM DUNSTONE'S TROUBLES,

AND HOW HE GOT OVER THEM.

BY

MRS. EILOART,

AUTHOR OF

"ERNIE ELTON," "JOHNNY JORDAN," "ARCHIE BLAKE,"
"THE BOYS OF BEECHWOOD."



LONDON:

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS,

THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.

NEW YORK: 416, BROOME STREET.

1870.

250. c. 241

LONDON:
SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

Co the Memory of

A GOOD MAN,

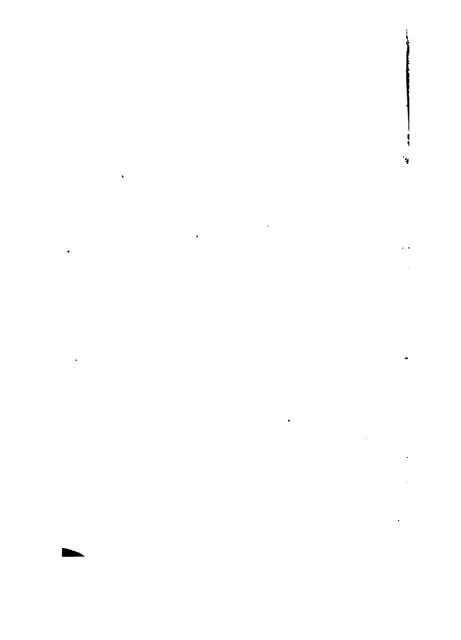
SOME OF THE STRUGGLES OF WHOSE EARLY LIFE
FIRST SUGGESTED THE IDEA OF THIS STORY,

IT IS INSCRIBED

IN ALL LOVE AND REVERENCE

BY

HIS DAUGHTER.





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TOM DUNSTONE'S TROUBLES.

CHAPTER I.

SPEAKS OF THE DUNSTONES PAST AND PRESENT.

NE fine September morning in the year 1808 the sun shone brightly through the curtainless window of a small room, in which a boy of about thirteen years old was sleeping. Sleeping as soundly as if his bed was of down with silken draperies around it, instead of being, as it was, a poor straw pallet stretched upon the ground. It was a dreary, comfortless chamber; scarcely a scrap of furniture in it but the straw pallet, and yet the young sleeper looked well and rosy, being evidently a boy who could bear privations well, and to whom the want of what others might think the most essential comforts.

would scarcely be considered a hardship. The room, although thus bare and meagre, was in a large and comfortable-looking farm-house one story high, a long, low, rambling building which had been erected more than a hundred years ago by the great-great-grandfather of the sleeping boy, and as far as could be seen from the window of the room he occupied, and stretching round on every side, were fields and lands which for one generation after another had been owned by those who bore the same name as did little Tom Dunstone.

They had been a race of thriving farmers in their time—sturdy, fearless, honest, hardworking men; large-limbed and well made, who paid tithes, poor-rates, and taxes duly; worked, themselves, at the head of their labourers; sat down to dine with their farming-men and serving-maids at one large table; went to church as regularly as Sunday came round, joined heartily in the responses, and slept through the sermon; helped the poor with a liberal hand, were kindly masters, and good husbands and fathers; feared God, honoured the king, and owed no man anything.

Things had gone well with them in the old farmhouse. Field after field had been added to the original homestead, till the Dunstones were as well to do men as any in their own parish or the next. They knew nothing, you may be sure, of steam ploughs, or machines for making hay; had never heard of guano; would have laughed their loudest at any one who would have talked to them of the advantages some knowledge of chemistry might give to the cultivators of land; but they went on as their forefathers had done before them, with the same rude implements and homely ways; laid by money and bought one field after another, and lived in a hearty, rough, plentiful fashion, which contented them sufficiently, and which they would have been sorry to have changed for the refinement and niceties that have now become indispensable to those in a similar position.

So things had gone till the time of Reuben Dunstone, the father of the little Tom whom I have shown you sleeping in the small bare room in the old farm-house; and at first matters had gone as well with him as with his father and grandfather before him. He had married, too, rather above his own position—the younger daughter of a small squire with a large family in a neighbouring parish. It was thought a come down on Miss Lucy Preston's part when she became his wife, but she made him an excellent one, nevertheless, and was much happier in the homely farm-house with its plentiful board and

homely comforts than were her three unmarried sisters who vegetated on the interest of their small portions at Bath, and sneered at Lucy, and thought they honoured her and her husband by accepting Christmas hampers full of pork and poultry, and considered that they showed themselves examples of Christian humility by deigning to recognise her as a sister, though they ignored her farmer husband completely. was much happier, too, than her elder sisters, who had married—one the lawyer, the other the doctor of Bridgetown-and who were in mortal fear lest any one in the place should know they had a farmer for a brother-in-law. They sent their children, though, to the farm-house for change of air in the haymaking and harvest time, and were not at all above receiving the pots of jam and baskets of apples, eggs, and butter the youngsters brought back with them on their return home; but they never asked Lucy's boys and girls back again, and they managed to give her to understand that in sending their own they did it out of sheer kindness to her in order that she might not feel that her family had passed over her altogether. But Mrs. Dunstone was of a gentle, loving disposition, and even these disdainful marks of family regard were grateful to her. She spoiled her nephews and nieces whenever they came to her house; sent kindly messages back to her sisters by them when they returned home, as well as more substantial tokens of her affection. She was no great hand at her pen, or I have no doubt she would have written these great ladies very affectionate epistles; and being of a lowly mind and contented disposition, she looked after her maids, her dairy, and her fowls, brought her children up tenderly but wisely, was a good mistress, a kind neighbour, and, as her husband averred when the time came that she was deaf even to his voice, the best wife that ever man was blessed with.

And in my opinion—though it seems poor praise to add it after all that I have said—was, though she had thought fit to marry a farmer, the truest and the best lady of all her family, whatever the prim old maids in Bath, or those high and mighty dames, the doctor's wife and the lawyer's in Bridgetown, might say to the contrary.

Reuben Dunstone was a good man to the poor, and you may be sure his wife went with him in that matter. Every Sunday so many labourers who had spent their best days in his service dined in his kitchen—and so many poor old women came and took their dinners home with them—liberal slices from the good roast and boiled, but

for which from one year's end to another the poor old creatures would not have known the taste of meat; and in many other ways Mrs. Dunstone was kind and helpful to those around her. She visited them when they were ill, had her own little stock of herb physics at their service, which often saved a doctor's bill, got places for the girls when they were old enough, and talked to them wisely and kindly as to the best way of keeping their situations and laying out their money; was always ready to help wherever she could, and did ten times the good in the parish that the Squire's lady effected who had five times the means at her disposal.

But troubles came, as they come to all of us, even to this sweet-tempered, happy-natured woman. Her two girls fell ill and died, one after the other, and her heart was almost broken by the blow. She did not know—never was to know—that a time would come, when her husband, who seemed now almost as grief-stricken as herself, would look upon the grave where his darlings were sleeping and say, "I thank God! they at least are provided for." Before that time came she herself was resting with her girls, and her husband was glad that it was so.

You will think, boys, for once, that I am going to tell you a grave, sad story. Go on with me a

little further, and I do not think you will find it so. But life is not all fun and prank-playing, even for boys, much more for grown-up folks, and I am speaking here of people who really lived and suffered; and little Tom, whose troubles and adventures I am now about to recount, was a real true person; and I have heard him tell of that old farm-house, and the sorrows that came to his father in it so often, that I must needs speak of them as the sad, serious things they were.

The beginning of Tom's troubles was in this wise:

Some folks in the county, much richer than Reuben Dunstone, thought, and with good reason, that if many of the low-lying lands were drained the crops would be increased greatly, and the value of the land trebled. This was all very well, only they should have gone to work a little more cautiously than they did, and not have gone buying acres upon acres of low swampy ground, paying twice as much for them as they had ever fetched before; for the owners, knowing for what it was required, of course took care not to let it go too cheap. This scheme of drainage became quite a mania and speculation. Reuben Dunstone embarked in it. He was not content with going to work on his own lands, but must

3.

buy shares in "The Great West Counties Drainage Company;" and when those shares went down his creditors were pressing him, for he had run into debt in order to drain his own farm, and the savings of years had been invested in shares that were now worth little or nothing.

Before this his good wife had been taken from him, so she was spared the knowledge that the farm which the Dunstones had so long held as a freehold in their family was sold by auction—the squire, Mr. Houghton, purchasing it—and that the very furniture was put up for sale in the old farm-house-everything-the old mahogany fourpost bedstead, black with age, and daintily carved, upon which so many Dunstones had breathed their last, the quaint old chairs, the curious bureaus with their nests of drawers, the patchwork and knitted quilts which Mrs. Dunstone's busy fingers had wrought, the old silver tankards and mugs, the very pride of Reuben Dunstone's heart, which had come down from father to son, and for so many years had graced the best parlour sideboard, the choice china tea service and punchbowls, of which Mrs. Dunstone had been as proud as her husband was of the silver-yes, even all these precious heirlooms were handled, felt, criticised, bid for, and sold.

And even then the creditors had not enough. Those were times when, if a man could not or would not pay his debts, he was kept in prison for years, sometimes for life; and there was one man more pitiless than any of the rest, who had lent Reuben Dunstone three hundred pounds to carry out the drainage of his lands, and finding himself not paid in full was determined to punish the defaulter. So the bailiffs were set to watch for Reuben Dunstone, and to take him, if they could, to Somerset jail, there to wear his life away, as some satisfaction to the creditor to whom he could give no other.

He might have left the place, but he had no money to take him elsewhere, and he felt too crushed and broken-hearted to care to make an effort to better himself. The Squire was in no hurry to take possession of the old farm-house; it seemed even to him, and he was not one of the most pitiful of men, too cruel to hound a man out without a little grace from the home he and his fathers had lived in so long. And Reuben Dunstone felt as if till driven out he *could* not go, he must stay there yet a little while—but a little while, till the end of all should come.

Only there was the fear of the bailiffs. So the farm-house doors were kept closely shut and

bolted, and the windows well secured, and Reuben Dunstone never ventured forth, even in his own garden, without little Tom being first sent out as a scout, to see if there were any suspicious-looking individuals lurking about. Tom was keen and quick, and would peer over the garden-hedges in all directions, and often gave his father warning just when the bailiffs thought themselves surest of their prey. A long low whistle from Tom, or the cry, "There's ferrets abroad, father," was always enough to send Reuben Dunstone within doors; and then little Tom, with his rosy apple face, would look up good-temperedly at the strangers, and tell them "he was afraid they'd had a long walk for nothing, but they'd find a stile or two hard by to rest on."

One or two of the neighbours finding Reuben Dunstone would not leave the house, had sent him in a little bedding and a few articles of furniture; otherwise he and his boys must have slept on the ground and sat upon the floor. As to food, Tom dug up potatoes from the garden and boiled them, getting wood as best he could from the neighbouring copses and hedgerows for his fire. There were plenty of apples for dessert, and one day Tom begged some flour from a neighbour, and made a squab pie—and really, as

Tom said, considering there was no meat in it, it was not so bad. And so things had gone on for the last six weeks before the opening of my tale, and the morning in which I showed you little Tom fast asleep in his bed on the floor.





CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH REUBEN DUNSTONE GOES FOR A LONG JOURNEY.

HE sun, shining as it did full through the curtainless window upon Tom's eyes, roused him effectually. Up he sprang, and began dressing himself. It was a simple toilet, very soon performed; and as in Tom's chamber there was neither basin nor washstand, he had to go downstairs and perform his ablutions under the pump. A small piece of comb, which he kept in his pocket, soon made his hair sufficiently smooth and tidy, and then Tom, with his face glowing and shining from the effects of his cold bath, set to work to prepare breakfast. He lit a fire on the wide kitchen hearth with some sticks he had collected the night before. He set out on the one small table three plates and as many mugs, and then, as the fire burned up, put some potatoes to boil in a crock which hung over it.

"We'll have them baked in the embers for

dinner," said Tom, "that'll make a very good change; and we'll have apples for supper, and, if father can spare me, I'll get some blackberries and nuts to eat with them. I'd fry the potatoes to-morrow only I've got no lard, and I do not think they'd do so well in water."

Tom looked sadly round the kitchen as he spoke, and thought of the time when the bacon racks had been loaded, and the hams had hung from the rafters, and his father's men had gathered round the great table, which was always so amply spread.

"I wonder whether I shall ever eat fried pork and potatoes again for breakfast," he said, as he watched his potatoes boiling; "and as to roast beef, I do not think I shall ever know the taste of that any more, unless in my dreams. I did dream I had it for dinner last night; and, oh dear, how sorry I felt when I woke. The potatoes are done. Father's late! I wonder he has not called me to dress Jack before."

Jack was Tom's little brother—the Benjamin of the family—and as such, in the trouble which had befallen them, doubly dear to his father's heart. He slept in the same bed with him, nestling up to the strong man's broken heart in the dark nights when Reuben Dunstone lay awake to think over his ruined fortunes. Jack had been

his mother's darling. He was a small, slight child of six years, not very strong, and with curious, old-fashioned ways, which caused Tom, who delighted in them, to give his brother the name of "Peculiar," to which Jack would answer as readily as to his own proper designation.

"The potatoes are done," said Tom again.
"I think I'll go in softly and see if Jack's awake.
I'll get him up if he is, and give him his breakfast, without waking father."

Tom went upstairs on tiptoe, opened his father's door noiselessly, and entered the room, which was as bare and wretched as his own. Reuben Dunstone lay on his back on the little straw pallet with which his neighbours' charity had supplied him, one arm under his head, the other lying by his side. It had been over Jack best part of the night; but when the little fellow woke he had crept away from his father's embrace, the arm which encircled him had seemed so heavy, and now he was leaning on his elbow, looking fixedly down at his sleeping father's face. He turned to Tom as he entered.

"Father's asleep; but I never saw him look so strange before."

Tom stole up and looked too at his father. It was a peaceful face, with a smile on it such as Tom had not seen it wear for many a day, and a calm, happy look, as if when Reuben Dunstone had laid his head on the pillow the preceding night he had left all his cares behind him. But somehow that look reminded Tom of his mother as he had last seen her—fair and still—before the coffin-lid was closed upon her, and he ran up to the bedside, crying wildly, "Father! father! wake!" and kissed the lips that gave no kisses back, and then caught his little brother in his arms, sobbing wildly out, "Oh, Jack! he's gone to heaven!"

And Jack burst into tears, and cried, "Then he ought to have taken us with him!"





CHAPTER III.

TOM'S GRAND RELATIONS TURN THEIR BACKS UPON HIM—JACK FINDS A NEW HOME, AND TOM MAKES A START IN THE WORLD.

DUNSTONE was decently buried, and not by the parish. His neighbours clubbed together to pay the fees, the Squire gave the coffin, and so, with Tom and little Jack as chief mourners, he was placed in the same grave as his wife and his two little daughters. Ambrose Dunstone, a distant relation, had taken the two boys home with him till the funeral was over, and something could be arranged for the future; but he had no intention of troubling himself any longer about them than at such a time he was compelled to do in common decency, and even if he had been more generously disposed to the two orphans, his wife, who was a keen, sharp little woman, would not have allowed him to do very much for them.

Tom and Jack had plenty of relations on the

mother's side, but they none of them seemed very ready to help the poor little unfortunates: the doctor's wife and the lawyer's when applied to by Ambrose Dunstone on their behalf, intimating that they had too many children of their own to be able to look after any others; and the old maids at Bath writing back that it could not be expected that they, who had wisely kept unmarried for fear of the troubles and disasters of the married state, should be disposed to take two such serious encumbrances upon themselves as two boys would be. They might as well have got married, and had boys of their own. There was their uncle the Squire, but he was a hardfisted, close-grained man, who had married a few years since a well-to-do widow for her money, and took such good care of it that even she could have none for the spending. Ambrose called upon him the day after the funeral, taking Tom and lack with him. Mrs. Ambrose had told her husband she should be just as well pleased if he returned without the children; the Squire, who was their own mother's brother, had a much better right to keep them than he, who was only their father's cousin four times removed. But the Squire would not even let the children, or Ambrose either, enter the house; he came out and spoke to the latter, telling him he had been a prudent man all his life, and had not saved money to spend it on other people's children; his sister Lucy had married to please herself, not him, and if she and her husband had left their children unprovided for, he did not consider that it was any affair of his.

"You're a well-to-do man, Mr. Ambrose," he added, "and bear the same name as the boys; can't you make them useful on your farm as you've no sons of your own? They'd surely earn their keep in a place like yours."

"My wife does not like children, never having had none of her own, Squire," replied Ambrose. "And we've enough to do to make both ends meet at the end of the year without saddling ourselves with other people's bairns; and no one has any business to put such a charge on me neither," he added, sulkily; "and sha'n't too, I can tell 'em."

"Just as you please," said the Squire. "Then I suppose they must go to the parish. Good morning, Mr. Dunstone."

And he turned on his heel and went into the house.

"Darn him for an old screw!" cried Ambrose, shaking his fist at him, which, however, had not much effect on the Squire, as his back was turned. "Well, boys, we must put our best feet

foremost and get home; and what the missus 'll say when she sees you turned back like a couple of bad halfpennies, I do not know. Here, Jack, your poor little legs must ache: come along, lad, and I'll give thee a lift."

Ambrose was not an unkindly man, but he thought too much of money-getting, and his wife encouraged him in this failing. He had, too, his share of homely yeoman pride, and he shrank from the idea of any who bore his name eating workhouse bread. Still it was rather hard that he should have to keep the two children when those who were so much nearer of kin to them, and were better able to do it, evaded the obligation. And then there was the fear of his wife. Ambrose was a large powerful man, and his wife a thin wisp of a woman, with a waist like a wasp's, but she ruled him completely, and had contrived to impress him with such an opinion of her superior sense, tact, and management that he thought there was no one in the world to compare with her. She had allowed him to bring the children home after their father's death, but without any intention of permanently maintaining them; and now it seemed as if the only alternative, if she refused to let the boys remain with her, would be tosend them to the workhouse, "which," as Ambrose said to himself, "was what no Dunstone had ever yet come to."

On he plodded, with little Jack on his shoulder and Tom trotting by his side. The latter was very silent, turning over the Squire's words in his mind, and wondering if Cousin Ambrose would really send Jack and him to the workhouse. Thinking, too, what a hard world it was, and what cruel people were in it; and how, if he lived to be as old as his father, who had died at forty-five, or his grandfather, whom he remembered feeble, white-haired, and seventy-nine, he should fight through all the troubles that would beset him when already he found them too many for him? And there was little Jack, too. He, Tom, could work—would work, and live, if need were, on a crust a day sooner than go to the workhouse; but what could little Jack do? He was too young even to scare crows, and Tom was afraid his own labour would never suffice for the two. He would try, however. To the workhouse he would never go, nor should Iack either—no, not if they had to eat hips and haws like the birds, or acorns like the pigs; and vague thoughts crossed Tom's mind as to the possibility of building a hut in Boreham Wood hard by, and living there Robinson Crusoe fashion along with little Jack, who would be quite ready,

he knew, to sustain the character of Man Friday. "But then there's the winter," thought Tom, "and what shall we do for clothes when these wear out? Hare-skins would have a funny look in England; besides, one must not kill the hares, and I do not know how many rabbits it would take for a suit, and they're rather scarce in Borcham Wood. Oh dear! I wish, as little Jack says, father had taken us with him when he went to heaven."

Sorrowful thoughts for Tom, only thirteen years old, and walking too through a lane that might have rejoiced any boy's heart, with the appletrees growing on either side, so close that any moderately tall person might gather the fruit, only that there was no need to do so, as plenty of ripe rosy windfalls lay on either side the lane, and might be taken honestly. And the blackberries in the hedges were ripe and juicy, and hung thick in tempting clusters; and the wild bindweed decked the brambles with its great white flowers; and the birds twittered and sang: while over all the deep blue sky looked brightly down upon the fair earth below and upon poor little Tom, walking sadly along with a heavy heart in his bosom.

Only, sad as he was, Tom was resolved about one thing, and that was, neither Jack nor he should go to the workhouse.

They had but a chilling welcome back from Mrs. Ambrose. Still after a time she relented a little from her coldness, and gave Jack, who with Tom had been set down to stirabout, seasoned with salt, for their evening meal, a drop of tea out of her own saucer. Tea, the cheapest, was seven shillings a pound at that time, so you may be sure Mrs. Ambrose set great store by it; and this sip of tea from her saucer showed that she was inclined to look favourably upon "Peculiar," even though his uncle the Squire had refused to have anything to do with him. Then after tea, Ambrose sent the boys out to pick up windfalls from the orchard, and told his wife the result of the visit to the Squire, and the probability that if they did not keep them from it, Jack and Tom would have to go to the workhouse.

"Try Mrs. Jefferies, in Bridgetown," said Mrs. Ambrose; "though she's a bigger screw if anything than her brother—wanting to make every fourpence go as far as another person's shilling, all to make a show, and lead folks to think the doctor's making his fortune, when by all accounts, with all her scraping, they've enough to do to make both ends meet at the end of the year. If she'd send off two of her maids and her foot-boy and turn her own hand to her house, instead of playing the fine lady, she might be able to keep

her sister's children instead of saddling us with them."

But Ambrose Dunstone knew very well that neither Mrs. Jefferies, nor Mrs. Brown the lawyer's wife, would be likely to do anything of the kind. They were far too anxious to keep up an appearance to have any money to spare for their poor relations; and if the children were in Boreham workhouse, it would be a matter of very slight importance to them so long as none of their genteel acquaintances in Bridgetown knew it.

"Darn them!" cried Ambrose, "they think of nothing but their finery and fallals, and 'ud let their own flesh and blood die in the gutter before they'd soil the tips of their fingers by pulling 'em out. As to the Squire, if ever I felt tempted to break a fellow's head, I did his today. I would not mind taking the children half so much if it was not for the thought that it's sparing his pocket at the expense of my own."

Ambrose and his wife talked long and anxiously that night, and at last Mrs. Ambrose agreed that sooner than suffer her husband's relations to go to the workhouse, if the parish would only agree to put Tom out apprentice, little Jack might stay with them.

"He does not eat much," she said, "and is quiet enough in the place; and by-and-by you'll make

him handy. And I sha'n't forget whenever I go to Bridgetown to let folks know we're keeping Madam Jefferies' nephew out of charity. There's no knowing but she may want for her own children before long."

And so, the next day, Tom's mind was so far set at rest as to the probability of Jack and himself being turned adrift, that he was acquainted with the decision Ambrose and his wife had arrived at. Tom was very ready to learn a trade; there was nothing in the world he thought equal to farming, but, as he could not follow that; he would do his best at something else. Jack, at any rate, would have a home if not a very good one; and by-and-by Tom would fetch him away and make a man of him.

The parish agreed to pay Tom's apprentice fee. It was an easy way of providing for him; and before a fortnight was over Tom's indentures were signed, and he was duly bound to learn the handicraft of a carpenter, including rake and hurdle making, from his master, Seth Wilkins of Bridgetown.

"And I'm thankful he's so near those two stuck-up madams, and hope he'll claim cousins with their children when they're out walking, dressed up like so many little popinjays," said Mrs. Ambrose, when she heard of it. But she had Tom's clothes all in excellent order, well washed and mended, ready for him to take; and she gave him a basket of apples, and a little dog'seared old Testament which she had had when a girl; and bade Tom "hold up his head, and not be afraid to look any one in the face, let them be as grand as they might."

So Tom bade her good-bye, and then turned to Jack, who was trying to look like a very brave boy indeed, and as if he did not mind in the least being left behind, and kept down the tears that were welling into his poor little eyes and the sobs that were choking his throat, till Tom was out of sight and hearing, when he gave a great roar and flung himself down on the ground, kicking his feet against it till Mrs. Ambrose trembled for his shoe-leather, and prayed him to be quiet. But Jack was deaf to her entreaties; he roared for full half an hour, at the end of which time he fell asleep, and woke in one of those amiable moods which Tom used to characterize as "Peculiar's sulking fits;" looking upon every one, from the cat to Mrs. Ambrose, as if they were his natural enemies, and in a conspiracy to inflict some serious injury upon him. This lasted for two days. Jack would have thought it an affront to Tom to have come out of his sulks an hour sooner, and at the end of that

time he became his old-fashioned, queer, precise little self, going about everything, as Mrs. Ambrose said, "like an old man of sixty instead of a child at six, and talking for all the world as if he knew more than all the other folks put together in it."

Tom was driven off with his small store of luggage by Ambrose in the tax-cart he used to go to market in. Bridgetown was but four miles from Boreham, and though Dobbin went at a slow pace, they were not long in reaching their destination. Seth Wilkins's workshop was a large shed at the end of a yard abutting on the high road, where clumps of hurdles and piles of wood lay seasoning in the air. By the side of the shed was the dwelling-house, a roomy, white plastered cottage, with a garden still bright with autumn flowers before it, and here Ambrose Dunstone stopped, and bidding Tom alight, handed him out his luggage, and then stretched out his hand to bid him good-bye.

Tom took it and held it tightly.

"Cousin Ambrose, you'll be kind to little Jack?" and then, dashing the tears away, holding up his head, and trying to look as brave as need be, Tom walked up to the house that was now to be his home, and after tapping at the door, opened it and walked in.



CHAPTER IV.

TOM AND DICK THORLEY BECOME GOOD FRIENDS—
TOM'S NEW MASTER AND MISTRESS—JACOB QUARLE
THE MISER.

OM opened the door and walked in, and then very naturally looked about him to see what sort of a place his new abode was, and who was in it. The survey on the whole was satisfactory. It was a large kitchen, comfortably furnished with plenty of dark old wooden chairs, tables that were as white as constant scrubbing could make them, and a dresser that was perfectly resplendent with pewter plates and mugs. There was a large eight-day clock in one corner, and a comfortably cushioned arm-chair by the hearth, in which, however, no one was resting but a large tabby cat, who opened his eyes and surveyed Tom when he entered, as if to ask his business. The floor was of red tiles, and the fire burned, not in a grate, but upon the hearth, as Tom had been used to see it in his own home. But at first it seemed as though the kitchen was unoccupied, except by the cat, till, on walking up to the hearth, Tom saw a boy, who appeared about fourteen, sitting on a small stool within it, and cracking nuts steadily, judiciously throwing the husks in the fire so as to make it burn the brighter.

Tom looked intently at this boy, who in return stared back at him. He had red hair, unmistakeably red; no passing it off for auburn or chestnut; it was clear bright red; his complexion was very much freckled, his mouth wide, his nose of a nondescript order, inclining to snub, and his eyes, which were very small ones, of a light hazel. He was short, too, for his age, and rather stout; on the whole, not a handsome boy by any means, but still with a pleasant good-tempered expression about him which made you take to him at once, and like that plain homely face of his better than many a handsomer one.

He went on eating his nuts, looking up at Tom all the while; and Tom, with his curly chestnut hair, blue eyes, and clear though sunburned skin, was certainly the best worth looking at; at last, having finished the nuts that lay before him, the red-haired lad observed—

"So you're the new boy, eh? Come upon trial to see how you like things?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I've come; but where's the master?"

"Gone out to see about a job in Finch's Lane, and the missus is out at chapel. There's always a prayer-meeting on Wednesday nights, so they left me at home as they expected you. Sit down, and have some nuts. I've lots more in my pocket."

So he had, and Tom sat down and discussed them on the opposite side of the hearth, and before Seth Wilkins or his wife had returned, the two boys were excellent friends. Tom had learned that his master was "very fairish on the whole, though rather given to the dismals, especially when he had an extra good piece of work on hand; and if the mistress was not so overfond of chapel and so very anxious that other people should be as particular fond of it as she was herself, she would not be a bad one. And she's not a screw with the grub either; there's always plenty, and no stint in the puddings, but that chapel three times a day on Sundays, and twice in the week to prayer-meetings if the master can only spare me—which sometimes by good luck he can't-is too much for any boy; it stands to reason, one can't be expected to like so much of it—it's not in nature."

Then Dick Thorley heard some of Tom's

troubles—not all, some lay too deep to be spoken of, but he told him of the loss of the old farmhouse (touching very lightly upon that of his father), and the behaviour of Squire Preston, and his grief at parting with Peculiar, and then as Dick saw the tears stealing down Tom's cheeks, he tried to cheer him up by picturing the advantages of his present situation in its brightest colours, telling him of the long drives into the neighbouring villages that he sometimes went with his master, and how he, Dick, had been occasionally entrusted to drive out by himself, and that very possibly Tom might in time be equally privileged, or at any rate be allowed to go out with only Dick instead of the master. He also told him what a famous place the neighbouring wood was for hazel-nuts and blackberries, and what fine skating there was in winter on the pond at the end of the town, which was not five minutes' walk from Seth Wilkins's. And he did Tom a great deal of good by the manner in which he inveighed against Squire Preston, who, he declared, was a mean rascal who did not deserve to have relations, especially nephews. Tom felt all the better for this conversation, and was very much pleased by the sight of his new mistress when she came in. She was a kind motherly-looking woman, with the clear complexion so common in Devonshire, from which she came. He was not quite so favourably impressed with the appearance of his master, Seth Wilkins being a tall angular man, with a pale, melancholy face, and as he had just made a contract for a very profitable piece of work, he was, according to his custom, more depressed and low-spirited than was his wont. The boys made an excellent supper off bread and cheese, cider, and cold apple-pie, and then after prayers retreated to a little double-bedded room upstairs, where they lay awake half the night talking together.

But they were up in good time in the morning, late as it had been before they went to sleep, and beginning the day as it should be begun with prayers offered up together, went to work till breakfast-time in the large workshop or shed. Tom was awkward at first, as you may imagine: he knocked his fingers instead of the nails, and had a narrow escape from sawing one of them off. But he was not a boy to be easily disheartened. He had come to learn a trade, and he meant to do it. How else should he ever get a home to take little Jack to? And after a time he became familiar with the tools, and in other ways his life went on pleasantly enough. His mistress was a kind one, and though Tom was not more fond of chapel than Dick, he liked the old minister who officiated there very much, and was always glad to see him coming up the garden to take tea with Mrs. Wilkins, as he had always a kind word or a harmless joke for Dick and him. And Seth Wilkins was not a hard He was apt to sing hymns of rather a depressing tendency, especially when work was briskest, and to declare mournfully he should lose by it whenever he undertook a fresh job, but Tom soon got used to that as "master's way," and Dick and he hammered away merrily enough themselves, whistling merry tunes that were quite out of harmony with Seth Wilkins's mournful ones. Then Tom made several acquaintances. Dick had quite a circle of friends. There were the baker's sons, who seemed to have a fine time of it driving about in their father's cart, and the smith's boys, who were learning betimes to help their father at the forge. And there was the miller's lad, who, being an only child, was spoiled by both father and mother, and was the sauciest. merriest, idlest boy in the place. Dick was very fond of him though, and so was Tom after a while; indeed, there were not many people who did not like Harry Swain, imp as he was. You may be very sure Tom saw little of his cousins or of his lady aunts. He had gone blackberrying and nutting with the elder children, swung the little ones and carried them on his back, but all that was forgotten now. If they met Tom they looked straight before them or on the other side of the road, and passed by him as though they had never known him. They had been very well brought up in the ways of gentility by their mammas, that was clearmuch too well brought up to think of saying anything to a carpenter's boy like Tom. As to his aunts, it was grand to see how they would look Tom in the face and pass by him; no one could ever have thought Tom was their own sister's child, still less that that sister had all her life shown them and theirs constant, unremitting kindness. They had forgotten all that now, you may be sure; all they thought about their sister was that she had inflicted an injury upon them by marrying as she had done, and that in justice to themselves they were bound to forget, as much as they could, all and everything connected with one who had so disgraced her family.

Only the pity of it was, that if they forgot it other people did not; and every one in the town knew quite well before Tom's indentures were signed that Seth Wilkins's apprentice was nephew to Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown, who were too proud to have anything to say to him, and that

little Jack, his brother, would have gone to the workhouse if it had not been for the charity of Ambrose Dunstone, his fourth cousin. I think on the whole, these ladies would have done better for themselves and their husbands too, if they had not made up their minds quite so steadily to have nothing to do with their dead sister's motherless children.

There was one person in the town whom Tom was not long in being introduced to, at least as far as having him pointed out to him could be called an introduction, and this was Jacob Quarle, that pitiless creditor of his father of whom I have spoken. Tom had never seen him before he came to live in Bridgetown; but he had heard of him as a close, hard man, with strange ways and miserly habits; and certainly his appearance did not belie the character. He dressed, not shabbily, but sordidly, vilely. There were all sorts of stories about the town as to Jacob Quarle's attire; some said that he had bought his coat from a rag-shop, changed hats with a scarecrow, and picked up his boots off a dung-heap. No one could think such tales improbable who looked at Jacob. He had a pinched, starved face, which was not to be wondered at if you saw him in the market cheapening scraps of meat, and going from stall to stall to see where he could obtain the best pennyworth of potatoes. He was lean and stooping in figure, and from under his great grey eyebrows his little keen black eyes looked sharply out. Boys always hate a miser; but when that miser has done his best to hunt and hound one's own dear father into prison, that hatred is likely to be increased. Accordingly Tom detested Jacob Quarle as he had never yet detested any one, and though he would not join other boys when they called the old man names, and gibed and jeered him, sometimes even going the length of pelting him with stones, he looked on when they did so with anything but disapproval.

Jacob lived in a large old house, not very far from that of Seth Wilkins. How it had come into his hands no one exactly knew, but it was generally believed he had not acquired it very fairly. It had been a comfortable dwelling in its time, but was now in a sad state of dirt and decay. The spacious, pleasant rooms were empty and unfurnished, and the rats and mice played unmolested in them. The stairs were thick with dust, and the carved oaken balustrades were mouldering and worm-eaten. It seemed strange that Jacob Quarle should care to keep such a house to himself, when he might have let it for ten times the rent for which he could have

obtained all the accommodation he really needed, dwelling, as he did, in one small room at the lower part of the house. Of course all sorts of curious stories were set affoat to account for his doing so. Some said he had buried his money in the garden, or hidden it behind the wainscots of the house, and was afraid either to leave or to take it with him. Others said that the house was haunted by the ghost of its former possessor, and that no one but Jacob Quarle would live in it. The house being flush with the street the boys were fond of peeping in at the windows, and trying if they could find out any of the mysteries of the habitation; and, of course, if they heard the rats scampering behind the walls, or in the evening gloom caught sight of a bat flitting through the room, it was set down at once to be the spirit which in common with Jacob Quarle tenanted the old house. I think Tom was inclined to believe some of these stories. I know Dick did; and often of an evening, when work was over, and their master allowed them to go out for a run, they might be seen flattening their noses against the window-panes, and trying to find out something of the ghost's movements.

Tom's month of trial was soon over, and as he was quite willing to become duly apprenticed to

Seth Wilkins, the indentures were signed, and after one day spent at Ambrose Dunstone's in company with little Jack, Tom became, in common with Dick, a permanent inmate of the carpenter's household.





CHAPTER V.

THE MISER'S DOG—WHAT TOM DID WITH THE MONEY
HE EARNED FROM JACOB QUARLE.

ACOB QUARLE had a dog, an ugly ill-favoured thing, but of which the old man seemed very fond, inasmuch as he was never seen without it. He did not feed it very well; but then, he half starved himself, so that it was not to be wondered at if he did not give the dog sufficient food; still the animal seemed to watch and understand his owner's slightest look, loving him indeed with an affection that might more fitly have been given to a better master. But the poor creature was not very popular in the town on account of its very fidelity; and then it was an ugly dog, of no particular breed, and, the market-women said, a thief, while the boys declared it was vicious, and would bite if it only had the chance. Not that any boy could ever say it had bitten him; and it

would not have been much to be wondered at if it had, for it was constantly being pelted, cuffed, and kicked by every one who came near it. Poor Shock when thus attacked would snarl and show his teeth, but never did anything worse, let his provocation be as great as it might. Tom soon knew the dog by sight as well as he did its master, and once or twice interfered to prevent the other boys ill-using it. As he said, the dumb thing could not help its owner, and was much the best behaved brute of the two; and Shock seemed to know that Tom had stood his friend, and once or twice left his master for awhile, and tried humbly to attract Tom's notice. But this was in vain. Tom would have nothing further to do with him than to protect him, if he could, from ill-usage. He was Jacob Quarle's dog, after all; Tom could not forget that.

One evening, at the beginning of March, when Tom had been about five months at Seth Wilkins's, Dick and he having knocked off their work early were told that they might run out for an hour before tea. They lost no time in availing themselves of the permission; and away they ran to a spot where they were sure to meet some of their friends coming from school. This was a large open space, just outside the town, and a very short distance from the school; and if the

boys got let out in time enough they liked stopping here for a game before they ran home to their tea, and on summer evenings would spend hours together on it, enjoying cricket and football. At one corner of this piece of land were a cluster of wretched cottages, looking as if they could scarcely hold together another twelvemonth, with the thatch half off of the roofs, the windows stuffed with rags or mended with brown paper, the palings of the gardens rotten with decay, and everything about them looking unutterably sordid and miserable. Nobody knew to whom these cottages belonged; but they were said to have been built in the time of Charles I., and they were called "The Keyhole Freehold," owing to there being a legend respecting them, that the possession of a key of any one of the house doors gave a right of tenancy to that dwelling. Certain it was that no one paid any rent; and that each inmate, whatever else he might be careless over, took excellent care of the key. But it is not with these cottages or their inhabitants that I have to do at present, but with a small enclosed piece of land by the side of the last one, and which was used in common by the occupants of all as a drying-ground.

At one corner of this ground was a well, which partially supplied the cottages with water. It

was not very deep, nor was the water very good, and it was generally covered by some old mouldering planks. This evening the boys had found a fresh way of amusing themselves, and this was torturing poor Shock. Some of them had espied him sitting outside a door, waiting for his master, who had gone in to collect some rent that was owing to him-several of the best houses in the town belonging to Jacob Quarle. They captured the dog, and fastening a rope round his neck dragged him towards Keyhole Freehold, and turning him into the drying-ground, began pelting him with sticks and stones. Some other boys soon joined them, and the miserable dog was chased and driven from one side to the other, while quite unable to escape from his assailants. It was a cruel game—but boys are cruel creatures; as if there was not wretchedness enough in the world without their making more! -and the more the poor creature barked and howled, and struggled to escape, the more pitilessly they laughed, and the more perseveringly they prevented his leaping over the palings. Tom and Dick came up when they were in the height of their amusement, and I am sorry to say the latter joined in it, appearing to consider it excellent fun.

Tom remonstrated with the boys, but they

only laughed at him, and round and round the enclosure poor Shock went, trying all in vain to escape from his tormentors. Presently he flew to the corner by which was the well, and sprang on to the cover, thinking to leap over the palings that way, as it was least guarded; but the wretched woodwork gave way beneath him, and down the poor creature went into the water. Some of the boys set up a shout, "We've done for him at last!" while others began to feel sorry for the animal they had thus hunted to its death in their thoughtless sport. Some of these, and Tom amongst them, sprang over the palings, and ran up to the side of the well, where they could hear the dog below whining pitifully and making unavailing efforts as it swam in the water, which was seldom above three feet deep, to climb up the well

"Lower the rope," said Tom; "and if it has the sense to get into the pail we'll haul it up."

The boys did so; there was scarcely one among them who was not as eager now to save the dog as he had before been to torment it to the uttermost. But poor Shock did not seem able to understand why the rope was lowered; he only moaned still more, and they could still hear him trying vainly to ascend the sides of the well. Presently Jacob Quarle was amongst them. He

liad missed his dog when he came into the street, and after a little time finding where it had been taken, hurried anxiously after it. He was a sordid, miserable wretch, but he loved that dog, and now finding it was in the well, he stood lamenting, and begging the boys to go down and save it.

"I'll give twopence—threepence—sixpence! there! to any one that does," he cried.

"Why do you not go down yourself if you're so fond of him?" asked Dick.

"I'm old—old," cried Quarle, shivering and drawing his miserable garments closer round him, "and the water's very cold, and I should be heavy for you boys to pull up. I'd rather give the sixpence to one of you. Wont you earn it?" he added, addressing Dick, who looked more good-natured than the rest.

"I would if it was any one's dog but yours," replied Dick.

"Won't you for a shilling—a shilling, mind, to any one that goes down and brings me up my dog alive! Alive, mind," cried Quarle, "a shilling! Two, then, two!" he repeated, as the dog's cries and struggles became more urgent. "Two shillings — three! — four!— five!" he almost shrieked, and fell on his knees; "five—five bright good silver shillings to any one that brings me

up my dog. Oh, boys! wont one of you go down and save poor Shock?" He held up his hands imploringly in his agony. Tom looked at him and hesitated. The man had been hard and pitiless to his dear father, and was a mean sordid wretch, but his trouble was very great, and the poor dog, after all, had done nothing to deserve death; another second and Tom threw off his jacket, and shouted, "Who'll hold the rope?—I'll go!"

There were plenty ready to say they would draw him up, and fastening the rope round his waist, Tom went, and was slowly lowered into the well. He soon had hold of the poor dog, and in another minute both were drawn up safely. Jacob flung his arms round Shock, and the animal licked his master's face with joy at seeing him again. Tom stood looking on, wondering how so hard and sordid a nature as Jacob Quarle's could feel love for anything. Presently Jacob remembered his debt, and pulling out his shabby purse began counting out the money.

"Five shillings!—five shillings! Dear, dear!—it's a sum. To think of your earning it like that, in a minute!"

"And running the chance of breaking his neck in doing it," said Dick. "Why did you not go down yourself, old boy, and save the five shillings, if you think so much about it?"

"Mind you see that they're good ones, Tom," cried Harry Swain; "he'll cheat you else."

"I say, Tom, give us a tuck-out at Dobbin's with part of the tin," cried some of the boys; "you ought to stand treat after such a slice of good luck."

Tom paid little attention to all they said, but he took the money from Quarle, counted it over, and tested it with his teeth.

"They're good—they're good," mumbled the old man; "I never passed bad money in my life."

"Let you alone for doing it if you had the chance," cried Dick, while Tom thoughtfully weighed the money in his hand, and stood with a darkening face looking at it; then he turned to Quarle—

"I'm Reuben Dunstone's boy, and I would not take a penny from you if I was starving! Take back your money, and much good may it do you."

Then he flung it full in Quarle's face, and walked sullenly away with Dick and Harry Swain, while the old miser stooped and picked up the money, muttering, "Foolish fellow! foolish fellow! to fling good money away like this. Come, Shock, poor dog, and let's go home to supper."



CHAPTER VI.

JACK'S VISIT TO BRIDGETOWN—TOM STANDS QUARLE'S FRIEND.

OM found the summer a pleasanter time than he had expected. If he could not have the fun of making hay himself, it was the next thing to it, he thought, working at the rakes and forks for others to make it with. Sometimes Dick and he had to labour long and late at this, but Seth Wilkins was a good master. and if the boys had extra work at one time, he always tried to make it up to them at another, and every now and then there was a whole long afternoon to be spent in cricket or football; and in the summer evenings they had time for other games when work was over. And then there were the drives with the horse and cart; when Seth could spare them both he would let them go together, to take home the hay-making implements they had helped to make, or the hurdles they had put together.

As these drives were mostly to farm-houses, Tom found himself in his own element again, and was fond of showing Dick that he knew as much about farming as the other about carpentering. These were pleasant visits too in other ways; the good wives of the farms were always hospitable, and made the boys partake of farm-house fare and home-made cider; and some of them had known Tom's parents, and would be very kind to him for their sake; and it cheered Tom up to hear the way they spoke of his father and mother, and he felt stronger and braver than ever when he found how those dear dead ones were still lovingly remembered and respected, for all the troubles of the latter days; and he made up his mind more firmly than ever to get a home for himself and little Jack, and, God willing, pay off every penny yet his father owed to every creditor, especially old Jacob Quarle.

"There's five shillings rubbed off his debt," said Dick, when Tom once communicated his project to him; "though perhaps you did not pay it back in the civilest way. Never fear, you'll rub off all the score in time. Fair and softly goes far in a day."

Now and then of a Sunday Tom got up early and went to see "Peculiar," spending the whole long day at Boreham, and going to the old parish

church with Ambrose Dunstone and his wife with his little brother's hand in his. Those were blessed days; they did not come very often-for Mrs. Dunstone was not very fond of visitors, and she quite looked upon Tom as one now-and therefore all the more precious. How Jack used to look forward to his brother's coming! Counting the days at the beginning of the week, and then, on the last day of all, the hours, falling to sleep on the Saturday night with the thought that he should see Tom the next morning, and waking early and running to the gate to keep watch for his coming. Mr. Ambrose might call lack in, but it was useless; he would turn round and simply remark, "I'm looking for Tom," as if that was quite sufficient to prevent his being expected to eat his breakfast, give the fowls theirs, chase the pigs out of the potato garden, tell Uncle Ambrose the porridge was ready, or do anything else that might be required of him. On other days he was obedient enough, and for a small fellow very handy, having quick sharp eyes of his own to see what was wanted, and ready little hands to do it with; but on "Tom's Sundays," as he called them, every thought was given to his brother; even the rain would not cause him to leave his post by the garden gate till Tom came up, when he would spring upon him, fling his arms round his neck, and cover his brown face with kisses, laughing and crowing with delight. Then he would slide his own little paw into Tom's and lead him up to the house, when he would fling the door wide open and march in with sparkling eyes and head erect, saying, in an authoritative voice, "Tom's come, and wants his breakfast."

One morning a thunderstorm came on when Jack was waiting at the gate for his brother. Down came the big heavy drops, thick and fast. Mrs. Ambrose went to the door and called the child in; Jack made no reply. If Mrs. Ambrose had been near enough she would have seen that he looked exceedingly sulky at being told to leave his post, as he considered it a most unreasonable thing of Mrs. Ambrose to require of him; but the idea of complying with the summons never crossed his mind. He waited on. though Mrs. Ambrose flung her apron over her head and ran half way down the path to tell him to come in. Jack gave her a look of indignant surprise, but vouchsafed no further reply; and finding the rain come faster than was pleasant, she ran in, threatening Jack with the loss of his breakfast for disobedience. After a while however, Jack finding the rain come through his clothes to his very skin, clambered up into an apple-tree a yard or so from the gate, and there he remained till he saw his brother coming along protected by a stout cotton umbrella, which fortunately for him Mrs. Wilkins had insisted on his carrying, as the sky looked threatening. Tom did not expect to see Jack till he got to the house, and was not a little surprised to find himself clasped by a small pair of damp arms, while a wet little face was pressed close to his own. Jack's legs and arms indeed were both round Tom, and the other carried him in under his umbrella, when Mrs. Ambrose began again to scold Jack, pouring out his porridge the while: but instead of telling him now he should have no breakfast, she contented herself with saying he did not deserve to have any, and desiring him to go and put on dry clothes directly. Jack moved. off to do her bidding, looking as if he thought her a most unreasonable person to find fault with him, and muttering in reply, "I was looking for Tom."

When autumn came, Dick and Tom had half a day given them for nutting, and now and then they had a couple of hours for blackberrying, but as the evenings grew longer, Tom felt the want of books more and more—felt it in a way that boys living in an age when books can be had so cheaply, and the very best of all some-

times the cheapest, cannot realize. Seth Wilkins had not an extensive library; there was "Fox's Book of Martyrs" on the book-shelves in the kitchen, which Dick used to delight in on Sundays; and the "Pilgrim's Progress," which Tom preferred. He used to picture himself, as he read it, going on Christian's journey, with little Tack by his side. He believed it all literally, and thought he could have conquered Giant Despair, or even Apollyon, with Peculiar looking on, though how he should have struggled through the slough of Despond with Jack to help through it, puzzled him. And there were Cowper's Poems—Dick knew "John Gilpin" by heart—and a book of ballads out of which Tom learnt "Chevy Chase" to repeat to Jack; and these were nearly all excepting the "Whole Duty of Man," and one or two others of the kind, which, though Mr. Wilkins recommended them very much to the boys, neither Dick nor Tom especially delighted in. Books were very dear then, but occasionally Seth Wilkins gave the boys a sixpence when they had been unusually diligent, and Tom would save up his share till he had acquired enough to make a purchase at a secondhand book-stall in the town. Jack used to delight in reading; and it was even more on his account than his own that Tom made these purchases, though he always made a point of reading them through, for he felt that he had very little learning, and that it would be as well to acquire as much more as he could.

When Christmas was drawing near, Tom began to wonder anxiously whether Ambrose Dunstone would ask him to his house to eat his Christmas dinner, and was agreeably surprised when his mistress told him he might ask his little brother to spend the day with him. deed, she said he might come the day before if Ambrose Dunstone would bring him over, and Tom should take him home the day afterwards. How Tom thanked her! but she told him he owed the treat to the minister, Mr. Dennes, who had asked it for him. Dick was to go on Christmas morning to his grandfather's, who lived ten miles off, though Dick would rather have stayed at the master's; for, as he told Tom, his grandfather was a "regular old screw," and the pudding he should partake of would be nothing to the one the mistress had made a fortnight ago, and which was hanging up in the kitchen ready for its final boil on Christmas-day. The minister was to dine at the master's, so although Tom was to lose Dick, he felt sure that he should have a happy day, and sat down, the evening after Mrs. Wilkins had told him he might invite his little brother, to write to Ambrose Dunstone, and ask if he could bring "Peculiar" over to Bridgetown.

What a labour that letter was, to be sure! Tom was no great scholar. You must remember he was hardly thirteen when his father's troubles came upon him, and when, of course, he had to leave school; and although a good boy and a clever one in many things, "book learning," as he called it, was not one that he most shone in. As I have told you, he did his best to repair his deficiencies by buying what few books he could, and getting as much out of them as possible. But it was not easy work for him. Farming, carpentering, riding, driving, all these things were much more in Tom's line than books or pen and ink, and Tom knew it, and wished he was more clever with them, fearing that all his life, try as he would, he should feel the want of the "book learning," which as a boy he had so little opportunity of acquiring. But Tom had better things in his favour after all than even the advantages the schools could have given him. He was brave, and honest, and true; and, though by no means a proud or boastful boy, full of selfreliance and quiet energy, with much of his mother's gentle, loving spirit in him. Not a boy at all to be despised, my young friends—who go

to the London University and King's College, or even to such "swell" places as Eton, Rugby, and Harrow-though he knew not a word of Latin, was wofully ignorant of many things that you pride yourselves upon being well acquainted with, and spoke, like many of his friends, with a Somersetshire accent, which I have not thought it worth while to attempt to bring before you here. No, not a boy to be despised at all, as he sat there, forming his large, queer letters and misspelling his words, and every now and then, as awkward writers will, blotting the sheet of letter-paper before him. The epistle was concluded at last, and Tom posted it, paying the twopence for it himself, for fear Ambrose Dunstone should refuse to do so.

Little Jack was delighted when he found howhe was to spend his Christmas; for, as Ambrose was to go to Bridgetown the day before, he readily promised Jack to take him there too; and accordingly, on the morning of Christmas Eve, Jack startled Seth and Dick, who were in the workshop alone—Tom having gone out of an errand—by running in there, and shouting at the top of his voice, "Where's my brother?"

Tom was soon in again, and Jack sprang into his arms, and the two hugged each other, and laughed, and almost cried with joy at the meet-

ing. Dick was very glad to see Jack, he had heard so much of him from Tom, and Seth Wilkins was so pleased by the child's affection for his brother, that he looked even more unhappy than usual, took the little fellow by the hand, and telling him he had better come to the mistress, as he would want seeing to after his long journey, led him into the bright, warm kitchen, where Mrs. Wilkins gave him a glass of ginger wine and a large piece of cake; and as, by the time he had finished it, she had concluded her morning's work, took up her knitting, and asking Jack if he could read, was surprised when he took up an old newspaper which had been lent her, and began reading its contents aloud so well, that she told Tom when he came in with Wilkins and Dick to dinner, "the minister himself could not have done it better."

"Ah, he's a clever fellow," said Tom. "Ain't you, Jack?"

Jack nodded. He liked to be praised, and was rather proud of his reading. After dinner he had to read to the master, who was as much pleased with him as his wife had been. But Jack forgot his gravity, and shouted and capered when Mr. Wilkins said that, as Tom and Dick had worked so well the last few days, they should have a half-holiday that afternoon, and take lack 56

out with them. This was glorious. Tom wished he could have found words with which to thank the master for his kindness, and was quite angry with himself that he could find nothing better to say than "Thank you, sir." Poor Tom was often angry with himself for not being clever, and never knowing the right words to say. Dick was told that he might go to his grandfather's that afternoon, instead of leaving it till the morning; but Dick declined, with a half chuckle. He was in no such hurry, he told Tom when they were alone, to get over to grandfather's. The old man never did anything but find fault with him when he got there, and was nearly as great a miser as old Quarle, only it was right, he supposed, to go over to the old man now and then, as he was the only one left belonging to him. But this afternoon Dick started off in high glee with Tom and little Jack, intending to have a good afternoon's sliding and skating with them. They passed by old Ouarle's house, and Dick looked up at it.

"Don't see a sign of smoke from one of the chimneys, Tom. I expect the old man lies in bed all day to save firing. I should like to know what he's got for his Christmas dinner to-morrow."

"Hush! here he comes, and his dog behind

him," said Tom. "He's going marketing-he's got an old basket with him."

Quarle came creeping along, looking pinched and blue and nipped up by the cold. His coat was so old and threadbare as to be scarcely any protection from the bitter frost; and he cowered beneath the cold wind, shivering wofully. His dog ran up to Tom, recognising him as a friend, and the old man paused when he came near the boys, saying, "Ugh!-it's terrible weather for old bones, my lads."

"Put a good warm coat on then," cried Dick, "and thee won't feel it, old fellow; or if you'll give me five shillings I'll write you a prescription for it, and it's very good medicine, only you must get it made up by the butcher and the brewer."

Old Quarle made some inaudible reply, and went on his way. Dick's prescription would have been too expensive a one for his fancy; and the three boys ran on, now and then taking a slide in a gutter, or saluting a friend by throwing a snowball at him. Presently they met Harry Swain and one or two others, and of course then there was a regular encounter with ' snowballs, even little Jack doing his part manfully, and making up tiny pellets and throwing them with all his might at all who threw at Tom. They were not very long at this game; for Harry Swain and the others with him were going to skate on the river which flowed a little distance from the town; so they were all soon tired of snowballing, and hastened along with Dick and Tom to the river bank.

"Didn't I stand by you, Tom?" said Jack, as they went on; "didn't I snowball the fellows well that hit you?"

"To be sure you did, Peculiar, and you always will, won't you?" replied Tom.

"Always, Tom, always—see if I don't;" and then Jack comforted himself by climbing up Tom, and giving him a thorough good hug and rubbing his little cold nose against his brother's cheeks, after which Jack felt very much refreshed, and able to snowball the whole world, if need be, in Tom's defence.

It was thorough Christmas weather, the snow lay in great heaps by the side of the paths, where it had become hardened and trodden down. The river was frozen over, and the boys looked forward to some glorious skating. Some of them had been cautioned by their mothers to be careful how they ventured on the ice; but when did boys ever heed such cautions? The river, they said, at this part was hardly deep enough to drown a cat; and as to the ice, why it had been

firm enough for a week. No fear of any harm happening to them.

Whether the river was deep or not, it was certainly very narrow at one part, but that was a little distance from the place where the boys were going to skate, and here a small foot-bridge had been erected, and an old woman, who lived in a cottage by it, had the privilege of demanding a penny toll from every passenger. She had given up all thoughts of taking much to-day—if people could walk across on the ice they would never pay her a penny for going by the bridge, and old Quarle was certainly not the person to do so. He had a little business to transact on the other side of the river, and if he could have gone over by the bridge for nothing, would have preferred doing so, for the ice was slippery, and he was afraid of being run down by some of the skaters; but he would much rather risk a fall than spend a penny, and so he came to the river-side, looking anxiously out for an opportunity to cross it safely. The boys saw him when they came running up from their game of snowballs, and a bright idea struck Harry Swain.

"Here's old Quarle! All ready for a game at snowballing? Let's pepper him well, lads. Now, old fellow, look out—we're going to begin."

"Good boys-good boys, let me alone!" cried

Quarle, piteously. "I'm too old for such rough play. Let me go on my business in peace."

"No, no, you're not a bit too old," cried the boys. "Throw at him, Tom; pelt him well, Dick. Now, old fellow, throw back again!"

"I can't—I can't," moaned Quarle. "Good boys—good boys, let me go on in peace."

"Hark at him!—what a row he's making!" cried some of the boys. "Throw at his nose—stop his mouth when he opens it. That's right, Bill; one for his nob and two for his heels!"

The old man turned from one side to the other, the balls hitting him in every part of his person. Tom had not joined his assailants, but stood, with Peculiar by his side, looking on. It was good fun, that young gentleman thought—why should he not join in it, and why not Tom? Perhaps he didn't like the trouble of making a ball for himself; never mind, Jack would make one for him. He stooped down, and with his tiny hands made two the size of walnuts, and then handed one to his brother.

"Go at him, Tom; hit him hard and make him sing out."

"No, no," said Tom, "put the balls down, Jack; I don't like snowballing an old man like him."

"Well, he is old," said Peculiar; "and what

do you let the others shy at him for? Why, Tom, I do believe he's getting away."

Tom looked at Quarle, and saw he was trying to escape the boys and cross the river, but they hemmed him in on every side, and the balls came faster than ever. Tom ran up and placed himself before him."

"He's an old fellow, boys; let him go."

"Stuff, Tom, you're always sticking up for him. Get away, do, and don't stand in the way."

"Yes, I shall; it isn't right to serve him so. Jack says it isn't."

"Yes, I do," cried Jack, now hoisted up on his brother's shoulder; "and Tom and I don't mean to let you do it either. Do we, Tom?"

There was a laugh at this, and the boys let the mannikin have it his own way, and told Quarle he might go on his, and the old man was not long in availing himself of their permission, but crossed the river as rapidly as his feeble limbs would allow him; and the boys put on their skates, those at least who had them, while those who had not contented themselves with sliding. Jack got on very well, — a great many of the boys had invested their spare pence in peppermint-drops and gingerbread-nuts, and every now and then one or the other of these dainties was poked in Jack's mouth, or thrust into one of his

hands, with a "Here, young one, take that," and Jack directly bit it in half and offered one part to his brother, and if Tom refused to take it, watched his opportunity and quietly slipped it into his pocket. Then Tom took hold of the little one's hand, and they had a slide together; then Jack got bold, and had a small slide on his own account, and got back to the bank looking quite proud of the achievement. And so an hour passed on till old Quarle was seen returning with his basket on his arm, and the boys crowded around him, anxious to know what he had been buying for his Christmas dinner.

"Is it a turkey and sausages?" asked one.

"No, no, it's a sucking-pig," shouted another, "I hear it squeaking;" and directly he began to do his best to squeak like the animal he spoke of.

This was a brilliant idea, and was instantly followed up.

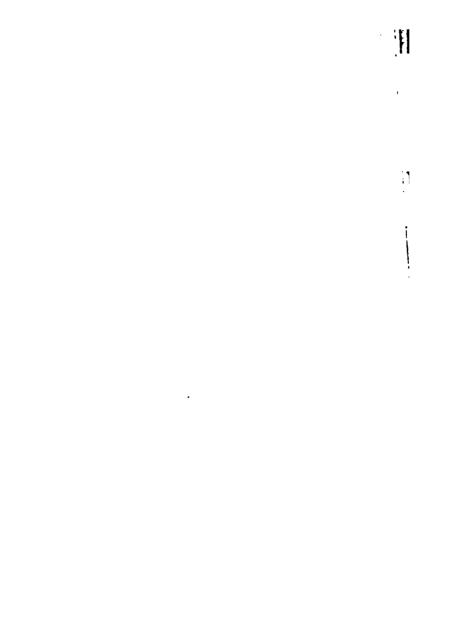
"It's a goose!" shouted one, and began hissing his loudest.

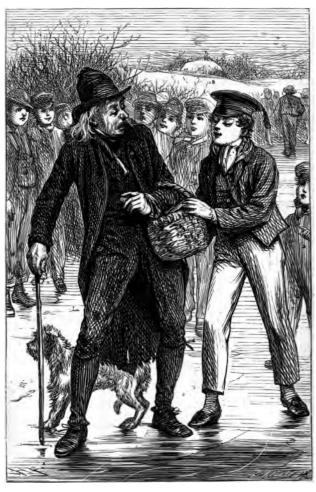
"No, it's mutton; don't you hear it baa?"

"It's beef, I'm sure, by the bellowing."

"No, it's ducks; don't you hear them quack?"

And the boys squeaked, and hissed, and baaed, and bellowed, and quacked round the old man till he hardly knew which way to turn for the noise. Little Jack came to the rescue.





"'Why, I do believe that's Fred, and he's going to steal the old man's dinner,' shouted Jack."—P. 63.

"There you are again! Can't you let the old fellow be in peace?" he shouted, at the top of his small voice.

The boys drew back, laughing. "Here's Tom's big brother calling us to order. He'll thrash us all if we don't mind what we're about."

Quarle might have got on quietly now had it not been for one young gentleman, whose mamma would have been quite horrified had she known that he was on the ice with a parcel of tradesmen's sons and their apprentices. This was Master Frederick Jefferies, the doctor's son, first cousin to Tom and Jack, and about a year older than the former. Both knew him well by sight, and indeed some years ago Master Frederick had been very well pleased to come to the farm on a visit, and had given little Jack many a ride on his shoulder; but that was all over now, and Master Frederick had been much too well brought up by his mamma to think of recognising any carpenter's apprentice as his relation. He now came up to Quarle, though the others had desisted, and lifting the lid of the basket, tried to peep in.

"Why I do believe that's Fred, and he's going to steal the old man's dinner!" shouted Jack, his little face aflame with virtuous indignation; and 64

he ran up to his gentleman cousin,—" I say, Fred, don't be a thief!"

Fred's gentility took the alarm. To think of this shabby little boy, brother to Seth Wilkins's apprentice, calling him by his Christian name. "Get away, you little rascal!" he said, angrily, and gave Jack a push which, whether intentionally or not, had the effect of sending the little fellow flat on the ice. Tom's blood was up directly. No one should ill-use Jack with impunity while he was by.

"How dare you?" he cried, angrily, and struck his cousin. It was a word and a blow, and the blow came first. Fred looked ready to cry. Fighting was not much in his line, at least when the assailants were boys of his own size. He turned away, trying to put the best face he could on the matter, muttering "Low fellow!"

"Hit him again, Tom! Give it him well! He's a sneak! He daren't hit back! Go at him, little Jack; punish him well for knocking you down!"

"No, I sha'n't," said Jack, looking very sulky; "and I won't let Tom, either. He isn't worth it."

This seemed Tom's own opinion, for seeing that Master Frederick was disposed to put up with the blow he had received, Tom let him go,

and taking little Jack by the hand, went sliding away. Then Jack said he should like to slide by himself, and Harry Swain offering to lend Tom his skates, the latter began making good use of them, and cutting figures-of-eight in very fair style. Old Quarle meanwhile was proceeding across the river by himself, anxious to be free from the boys, when he heard a suspicious crack in the ice beneath him.

The old man trembled. "If it should give way before I reach the other side," he thought. "I wish I'd gone by the bridge. There it is again! I shall be drowned—drowned! To think of it, after spending all this money! Here, Shock!" He gave the basket to his dog, who took it in his mouth, and was soon with it on the other side, and his master went forward with more confidence now he had only himself to think of.

Another step and he heard another crack, and felt the ice give way beneath him. At that instant a sharp, shrill cry struck on his ear, and turning his head he saw a sight that for a moment made even him forget his own personal danger. The ice had broken in the very part where the boys were most numerous, and in the very midst of their frolics they found themselves in deadly and terrible peril. There they were,

battling for dear life in the cold treacherous water, with the blocks of ice, which but a moment before had been their playground, hemming them in on every side, and adding to their danger. Then there were cries and prayers for help, instead of the boisterous jests and laughter that had resounded in the air but a minute before; cries so woful and so fearful that once heard they could never be forgotten; groans of horror, as the death-cold water froze the young blood that just now had been bounding so merrily; hands stretched out frantically, in the vain hope of finding something to hold by, if only for a moment; faces whose very lips were white with dread, and childish eyes looking wildly round to see if there was no help near in the dread struggle that they had to wage.

And all boys too! Not a grown man among them. Boys, with mothers at home watching for their return, and wondering, may be, what kept them late. From more than one Tom heard the vain cry "Mother," and Tom wondered, if he called on his, whether she, in heaven, would hear and send help to little Jack in his peril. Tom himself was in no imminent danger as it was. The ice had given way underneath him, and he was up to his armpits in water, hemmed in too by blocks of ice, so that it was impossible

for him to do anything for his own escape or to facilitate that of others. But by flinging himself forward on the main body of the ice which was just before him, he knew he should be able to keep up for a time, while others were in instant need of help. Little Jack had fallen down in a sitting position, and was floating about on a large block of ice, and Tom called out to him—" Keep quiet, Jack—keep where you are till help comes. I see where you are."

Jack nodded. Tom saw him, and he saw Tom, which was a great comfort under present circumstances. Then Tom shouted for help with all his lungs, and old Quarle did so too, in his feeble, quavering voice, and the old woman came out of her cottage by the bridge, and shrieked to heaven for mercy when she saw the struggle going on in the water, and then, like a brave old soul as she was, set to work to see what she could do to help.

There was a small pleasure-boat kept in a shed by the side of her cottage by a gentleman, who sed it occasionally to row upon the river. She ot this out. It is wonderful what strength e sometimes find when we most need it. And ld Quarle, having by this time tottered to the nk, she bade him get in it with her, and push amongst the blocks of ice, to save as many as

they could. But the old man only shook his hands in helplessness—shook and shivered and trembled, so that she angrily bade him go into her cottage, and keep a good fire to warm the poor creatures when she brought them to it. But help was at hand. Four or five labourers were going home, and two got in the boat, the others walking by the river side to help those who were nearest to it. Then old Winny Trip went herself to her cottage, heaped up her fire, put her two thin blankets before it, and filled her kettle, and then hurried down to the river side to bring in any who might be rescued.

One of the men had waded into the river up to his shoulders, and brought out a small boy of eight years old just as he was sinking under the ice for the last time. The little fellow was cold and speechless, but Winny Trip soon had him by her fire, rubbing and chafing his limbs, and before long he was able to ask for his mother.

"Ah, mother indeed," said Winny; "what was she about to let you go on the ice by yourself, child?"

"Didn't know I went—told me not to go," sobbed the child; upon which Winny was about to preach him a sermon upon disobedience, when it was cut short by the entry of two more of the labourers, each carrying a boy and leading

another. Winny had her hands full; but fortutunately, seeing that old Ouarle could be of no use in rescuing the drowning, as soon as she found herself at liberty to attend to her fire herself she had despatched him to a gentleman's house, five minutes' walk from her own, and the mistress of it came hurrying down, followed by her servants, bringing blankets and brandy for the sufferers. There was enough for all to do; and old Quarle, after looking anxiously round and not perceiving Tom, went down by the river side in the hope of finding him. It was not long before he saw Tom, not very far from the shore, but so hemmed in with ice that it was difficult to reach him. Nor did Tom wish as yet that any one should attempt to do so. On the contrary, he kept pointing out others of his companions who were in more imminent danger than himself, to the men in the boat. They had just taken little Jack in as old Quarle came up to the river. but the only thanks that young gentleman gave them were the half intelligible words—for he was so cold he could hardly speak—"Why don't you see after Tom?"

Then, half frozen as he was, he scowled sulkily at his deliverers for not having thought of his brother before himself.

"Hurrah, Jack!" cried Tom. "Run in to the

old woman's and get warm, that's a good boy! I'll soon be after you."

Jack was placed on shore, and the men rowed out again. Tom's limbs were beginning to feel numbed and dead with the bitter cold of the water, but he bore up bravely yet.

"There's Harry Swain!" he cried, "holding on by the ice over there. He can't keep up much longer; and there's little Bill Tuckett near him. Make haste; he's such a little fellow."

Another second and Bill Tuckett, a very small boy indeed, would have relaxed his hold of the ice and dropped beneath; and Harry Swain's powers of endurance were becoming almost exhausted; but they were taken into the boat, and then the men steered their way as best they might amongst the blocks of ice, and took two more up who, like little Jack, had saved themselves by floating on them.

"Why don't you see after Tom?" said Harry Swain, when they had got him in. "That's him over there."

The men looked in the direction he pointed.

"Ah, he's a good 'un, a real good 'un," one of them said, "and has been thinking of every one but himself; but how be we to get at him?"

"He's wedged in the ice, and who's to tread

on it to reach him?" said the other. "As like as not it'll break as soon as a foot's set on it."

Harry would have answered their questions by going himself. Let the ice be safe to venture on or not, he was not the boy to think of that when his friend's life was in peril. But his limbs were so stiff that he could scarcely walk, and he was half-dragged, half-carried by one of the men to Winny Trip's cottage. He met Dick on the way. He had been one of the first saved, and having warmed himself by Winny Trip's fire, was running back to see if he could be of help-to others.

"See after Tom, Dick," Harry moaned, feebly; and Dick hastened to do so.

"Tom! Tom! where are you?" he shouted, and Tom replied—

"Here!"

"He's fixed," said Dick, looking ruefully at his friend's position; "and it wont be easy to get at him either."

He ran up to the men—" Can't you do something for Tom out there? He'll be friz to death if you don't look sharp."

Old Quarle came up with the same question. "Hadn't the men a rope? Couldn't one of them go on the ice and cut Tom out of it?"

"How was a rope to be thrown so as to reach

Tom?" they asked him; "and as to going on the ice, it was sure to break under them if they did. The little 'un was a fine fellow, but——"

"You don't mean to say you're going to stand by and see him drowned before your eyes?" cried Dick. "If there was only a rope I'd go across myself to him. Oh, Tom! Tom! to stand by and see you die like this!" And Dick stamped the ground in passion at his own helplessness, while the bitter tears stood in his eyes. Then he ran off, and was out of sight in a moment.

Tom looked wistfully at the men. "Can't you help me?" he said, quietly.

They looked at one another and shook their heads. There was no reaching Tom by the boat, and each one felt afraid to venture on the ice; then old Quarle addressed them.

"He's a good boy! a good boy! my men. Wont you try and help him? It's a sad thing to see him die like that. There's not many such boys in the world. Wont you go? wont you go? The risk's not much. I'd—I'd make it worth your while. I'll give a guinea if you bring him out."

The men shook their heads; times were hard, and they would have been glad of the money, but the risk was very great. "A guinea—he's a good boy—he saved my dog from drowning—though he flung my money in my face, I should like to save him. A guinea—five—my men. Oh! be quick—do—ten then, there! Ten to whoever brings Tom Dunstone safe to land!"

Still the men hesitated, when Dick came rushing up with a coil of rope in his hand. No one else had thought of it, but it was the rope from Winny Trip's well. He had unwound and cut it, and in another second had it tightly fastened round his waist, leaving an end for him to secure Tom by, while he placed the other in the hands of one of the men. Then he crawled gently on the ice towards Tom, who watched him fearfully.

Would Dick reach him without the ice giving way? and if it broke beneath their double weight would the rope be strong enough to hold them both? At last Dick was near him.

"Here we are, old fellow!" he cried cheerily, and then pulled at Tom, who was almost helpless, and got him right on the ice, then fastened the rope round him, and the two together began creeping back, every one on the bank watching them anxiously. Nearer—nearer yet—a little more and they would be safe upon the land. Nearer yet—then came a crack that was pain-

fully audible to those on shore, but the men pulled the rope quickly in, and the two boys were dragged to land.

"Hooray!" cried the lookers on, and "Hooray!" cried Dick; and then he behaved like a girl, and flung his arms round Tom's neck, and hugged him tightly, saying, "I thought I'd get you out of it, old fellow!" and then the two boys were led off to Winny Trip's cottage; and when little Jack, who was on the look-out, saw them coming, he rushed into the house again, shouting out, "Put the kettle on again! Mind it boils! Here's my brother Tom coming, and I know he'll want some brandy-and-water."





CHAPTER VII.

QUARLE PAYS TOM A VISIT, AND TAKES MRS. WILKINS
BY SURPRISE.

OM spent a very different Christmas-day to what he had anticipated. He had caught a violent cold in his limbs by remaining so long in the water, and found himself unable to leave his bed the next morning. What seemed worse in Dick's eyes was the fact of Mrs. Wilkins saying she was afraid he must have neither goose nor pudding for dinner, as he was very feverish, but content himself with a little mutton broth.

"Mutton broth at Christmas! Oh, Tom!" said Dick, ruefully. "Why, you'll be worse off than I shall. To think of the mistress serving you like that! I didn't think it of her."

"And she sha'n't do it neither," said little Jack, who was present. "You'll see if I don't save the best half of my dinner, and bring it up to Tom."

But Tom said he could not eat it even if Jack did. He had no appetite, and a dull, heavy feeling in his head. The mistress knew what was best for him, after all.

"I suppose she does," said Dick, ruefully; "though it's hard to see how mutton broth can be good for any one on Christmas-day. Well, good-bye, Tom. I wish I could stop here and keep you company. Now, little Jack, mind you take care of your brother."

"All right," said Jack, with one of his nods; and then he perched himself by the foot of Tom's bed. The day was cold, and there was no fireplace in Tom's room, so that of course there could be no fire; but Jack made the best of existing circumstances by taking a blanket off Dick's bed and wrapping it round him. There he sat doubled up like a ball, with his elbows on his knees, and so covered up in the blanket that scarcely anything was visible of him but his little bright eyes which were intently fixed on Tom. Mrs. Wilkins came up soon to see how the latter was going on, and asked Jack if he was not cold, and tired of staying there, to which he replied, rather indignantly, "No, I'm minding Tom."

He deigned, however, to go down to dinner, but kept his word as to the goose and the pudding, contriving when he thought himself unobserved to smuggle a good portion of each into his pocket. Then he went upstairs, and finding Tom fast asleep, with his mutton-broth scarcely tasted by his side, quietly drew his blanket over himself again, and resumed his watch. Then when Tom woke he went up to him. "I've got you something better than that stuff, Tom. Look here; and he pulled out a lump of pudding and a slice of the goose, and popped them down by Tom, who shook his head when he saw them.

"It's no use, Peculiar; I couldn't eat them if I were to try ever so. I feel so hot, and I have got such a strange taste in my mouth. Do you know, Jack—do you know, I'm—I'm afraid I'm going to be ill."

Jack opened wide his eyes with fear. "You mustn't, Tom, you mustn't. Oh! Tom! Tom! don't you die and leave me too!"

"No, Jack, no. Leave you—I should think not. No—no, I wont leave little Jack." And presently Tom fell into an uneasy sleep, moaning every now and then, and crying out at intervals that he would not leave little Jack. Mrs. Wilkins and the minister both came up to see him, and when he woke the former gave him a dish of her best tea—it was always a dish of tea at that time of day—and never before or since did

Tom taste anything so delicious. He passed a troubled night, and the next morning was so much worse that Seth Wilkins himself went for the doctor. It was a very good thing for Tom that his master said he would not call in the boy's uncle, lest he should think they wanted him to attend for charity. Tom was a good lad, and shouldn't be beholden to any of his grand relations; and so instead of Dr. Jefferies, who would have dosed and physicked and blistered Tom till he had brought him to death's door, he called in young Mr. Wheatley, a new-comer in the town, who was daring enough (being young and venturesome) to treat Tom in opposition to all the old-fashioned ways that Dr. Jefferies delighted in,—gave him very little physic, never once blistered him, but left nature, which was pretty strong and vigorous in Tom, to do her own work, and battle her way to health without let or hindrance from him.

But what was to be done with little Jack? That was the question which was debated at dinner time, when Dick had come home from his grandfather's and Seth in from his work. Who was to take him over to Boreham, for Seth and Dick were very busy. Jack settled the matter himself.

"I must stop here," he said. "What's the

good of sending me away? Who's to take care of Tom if you do?"

Mrs. Wilkins was disposed to think this a very sensible idea of Jack's. Mr. Wheatley had said there was nothing infectious in Tom's illness, and Jack could run up and down and wait on his brother, and tell Mrs. Wilkins when he wanted anything. And then Dick thought that Harry Swain would not at all mind riding over on his donkey to Ambrose Dunstone, and letting him know why Jack had not returned. So directly after dinner Dick ran over to Harry, who agreed to go off at once to Boreham, and then Dick came back to his work, thinking very sadly what a different Christmas time this was to what Tom and he had looked for.

Presently he heard the door of the workshop open, and looked up to see if it was his master, who had gone into the yard to pick out some wood he wanted. To his surprise it was Jacob Quarle, who stepped up to the bright wood fire and warmed his thin hands over it; then he looked round and said, "Where's the other?"

"You mean Tom, I suppose," said Dick; "well, he's upstairs in bed, and ain't likely to be out of it for some time, the doctor says. Worse luck for him and me too, I'm sure."

"Ah, you'll have more work to do, I suppose," said Quarle.

"You old——" Dick checked himself in time, for he was going to say something not too complimentary. "I suppose you fancy it's *that* I'm thinking about. And where's the ten guineas you promised any one that saved Tom? I think I've the best right to them, haven't I?"

"I didn't think you wanted to be paid for that," said Quarle. "And what's a boy like you to do with ten guineas?"

"Well, I wouldn't hoard it up the chimney, where it would be no use to me or any one else," replied Dick; "and I shouldn't mind if I treated you to a dinner out of it. I wonder whether you remember what roast beef's like?"

"It—it was the men I said I'd give the money to if they saved the lad," said Quarle. "Who'd think of offering ten guineas to you for doing such a thing?"

"Well, I never expected to get it, so I'm not disappointed," said Dick. "But Tom's precious bad, suppose you pay his doctor's bill instead?"

"I—I should like to see him," said Quarle; "do you think Mrs. Wilkins will let me?"

"I'll go and ask her," said Dick, and he ran off at once, and presently returned, saying that the mistress said he might take Mr. Quarle upstairs. He led the way, and Quarle followed him to the little bedroom, where they found Tom in a deep sleep, breathing heavily, while little Jack, wrapped in his blanket, was watching him. Quarle sat down and looked at the boy attentively, leaning his hands on his stick and his chin upon them. His dog, who had followed him, seemed to share his master's concern for Tom, sitting with his tail curled round his legs and his eyes fixed on the boy the whole time Quarle remained in the room. After a time the old man went downstairs and into the kitchen, where Mrs. Wilkins was busy.

"He's a good lad—a good lad, that one upstairs," he said, addressing her; "you ought to take good care of him, Mrs. Wilkins; you wont easily get another such in his place."

"Yes, he's a good boy enough," said Mrs. Wilkins, "and you've reason to say so, Mr. Quarle, seeing how he's stood your friend after all your ill-usage of his father. But did you only come here just to tell me Tom Dunstone was a good boy? The master and I had found that out for ourselves by this time."

"Yes; and to say that—I shouldn't like him to want for anything, Mrs. Wilkins. I'm a poor man, and times are hard; but so far as a bottle of wine goes, or a little help with the doctor's

bill, I'll help you out with the expense of Tom's illness.—That's all; but don't let the doctor know it, he'll only be sending in twice as much medicine as need be if he does."

Then old Quarle shuffled out of the house, followed by his dog; and Mrs. Wilkins, lifting up her hands and eyes, said to Dick—

"Only think of that now! Fancy his sending the poor fellow wine, or part paying his doctor's bill! I wonder what Tom will say when he hears of it?"

"He wont drink a drop of the wine that Quarle sends if he knows where it comes from, missis," said Dick; "and if he's any notion that Quarle's going to pay the doctor's bill, I believe he'll die out of sheer perverseness. He's a good fellow is Tom, but a queer one too in his way, and I don't think it'll do to let him know Quarle's done anything for him till he's well and strong again;—that's if he ever does get well," said Dick, mournfully, "and if he doesn't,—oh! missis, what shall we all do without Tom, now we've got used to him?"





CHAPTER VIII.

A DULL CHRISTMAS-TIME FOR TOM—LITTLE JACK IS
TOO MUCH FOR HIS UNCLE.

OM'S illness was a very serious one. Fever set in, and for some days he was delirious, and unconscious of all that passed around him, and when the fever subsided it left him painfully weak and helpless. Little Jack was a first-rate nurse in his small way, and Mrs. Wilkins was kind and tender as a mother to the poor invalid, while every spare hour that Dick had was spent in Tom's sick room. Old Quarle was not admitted there again however, Mrs. Wilkins fearing the effect the sight of him might have on Tom. But he came every day, and very often brought something for Tom,-it might be oranges, the finest in the market, though he would spend an hour in going from one to the other of the saleswomen and chaffering about the price. Or as Tom grew better he would bring a partridge or a chicken to tempt his appetite, and they were

sure to be first-rate of their kind, which, as Dick said, was the more to be wondered at considering that there was not a boy in the town but believed that old Quarle himself subsisted upon rat-stew and sparrow-soup. And he brought wine too in curious long-necked cobwebbed bottles, such wine as no one could buy in Bridgetown, and which the doctor said would do Tom more good than all his medicine. But Tom was not told of all these kindnesses from the strange old man, for Dick said he was certain he would swallow neither the wine nor the food if he knew whence they came, though the minister thought that he ought to be told as soon as he grew better. Mr. Dennes was a great deal with Tom; they had many long quiet talks together in the little room as the boy grew better; and little Jack would sit listening, with his head between his hands and his bright eyes turned first on one and then on the other, to all that passed.

On the whole this illness was not a bad time for Tom; he learned many things in it, both from his own heart and the minister's gentle teachings, which he remembered all his life through. Illness can teach us many lessons, my boys, which we seldom care to learn in our health and strength, and it is well for us if we remember them when we see the sick room and come into the bustle and

stir of life again. And after a bit Tom came downstairs, and was installed in state in the master's own easy-chair by the fire, and little Jack sat at his feet looking up in his face, and Mrs. Wilkins knitted, sitting opposite to him; and when the master came in, they all knew that he was pleased to see Tom down again, yet he looked thoroughly miserable, which he had not done the whole time of Tom's illness. As to Dick, he behaved shamefully, pretending to laugh when every one could see that he was ready to cry, and having nothing further to say for himself than, "There you are again, old fellow."

Jacob Quarle came the next day to see Tom, and Mr. Dennes happened to be there at the time. The old man sat himself down on the opposite side of the fireplace to that where Tom was, and leaning his head on his hands and resting them on his stick in his usual manner, stared intently at Tom for some minutes. The minister had been acquainting Tom with Quarle's kindness to himself, which had elicited the remark, "I wish, sir, he'd kept his wine and things to himself; I'd never have taken them if I'd known from where they came," and just then Quarle entered. After a while Tom thanked him for what he had done for him, but in a very thankless tone of voice, adding, "and if you'll only let.

me know what they all cost, sir, when I'm a man I'll try and pay you off, as well as all the money my father owed you."

"I—I didn't give them for payment," said Quarle, flushing up through the dull leaden colour of his cheeks; "and as to the money your father owed me, what business has a boy like you to trouble himself about that?"

"Because if it hadn't been for that money, my father might have been living yet," said Tom. "That seemed just to finish him up. It was very hard for an honest man like him to be hunted as if he'd been a thief; and you were the hardest of all his creditors."

"A man's a right to look after his own," said Quarle, sullenly; "but what's all that to do with you and me, boy? When I ask you to pay your father's debts it will be time enough for you to do it."

He got up, took his hat, and went sullenly away. Then old Mr. Dennes turned to Tom, and gently—very gently, for he saw the boy was weak and suffering—reproved him for the harshness with which he had repaid Quarle's efforts at kindness. "He meant well by you, my lad; you should have met him in a different spirit. I believe it is only of late that he has ever thought of doing any one a kindly turn, and you who are

the first to whom he has tried to do so, ought not to have checked him thus. The man is hard and close enough in himself, hard words from you will never make him any better."

Tom felt that he had done wrong, and promised to thank Quarle in a different manner when next he saw him; and then, leaning back in his chair, closed his eyes and slept for a couple of hours, when he was awoke by the entrance of another visitor.

And this was his uncle, Dr. Jefferies. As I have said, Seth Wilkins would not call him in to attend the boy, fearing in his honest pride that he should fancy he wanted him to give his services for nothing. And Mrs. Wilkins, who did not at all approve of Dr. Jefferies, encouraged her husband in this resolution, and suggested that Tom should be attended by young Mr. Wheatley, whom, although a new-comer in the neighbourhood, she had already heard spoken very highly of. But although Tom got on a great deal better under Mr. Wheatley than he could possibly have done under Dr. Jefferies, who, as we have before said, would have bled and physicked him till he had brought him to death's door, Seth Wilkins was not altogether satisfied. Dr. Jefferies was a doctor much more to his mind than Mr. Wheatley, who, according to Seth, did not send in half enough physic for his money, and so to-day, feeling a touch of his old complaint the lumbago, he hailed Dr. Jefferies as he saw him driving past the workshop, and when he entered, began detailing his complaints with his accustomed mournfulness.

Seth thought he was poorly when the doctor came in, but he felt himself very ill indeed before the doctor went out. There was nobody like Dr. Jefferies for impressing a man thoroughly with the importance of his own case. He shook his head and looked graver and graver as Seth went on with a recital of his ailments, till the latter began to think that it would be almost as well if as soon as the doctor had gone he were to set to work at his own coffin, and save his wife the trouble of ordering it for him.

"You should have called me in sooner, Mr. Wilkins—you should have called me in sooner," said Dr. Jefferies, when he rose to go; "people never will learn the importance of taking things in time. I shall be round in an hour, and if you will send your boy there over, will send you back a plaster and a draught and an embrocation. If you're not better to-morrow, we'll try a dozen or so of leeches—or cupping; but I almost prefer the leeches. Yes, yes, it shall be the leeches; they're

excellent little creatures. I'm partial to themvery."

Seth looked more mournful than ever. He had no idea there was half so much the matter with him before he had seen Dr. Jefferies, and he felt profoundly impressed with the doctor's cleverness in finding it out. Then he thought, as he was there, he should like him just to see Tom, who seemed getting on very slowly, and who, in Seth's opinion, had not had nearly so much physic as he should have had.

"Will you step this way, sir?" he said; "I've a lad here—an apprentice. I think, too, you know something of him: but that's neither here nor there. I'm not quite satisfied with the way he's going on. My missis would have Mr. Wheatley to him," added Seth—laying, like Adam, the blame on his wife—"he's a clever young gentleman, but he is young, and I don't think takes quite such active measures as he should."

This was a long speech for Mr. Wilkins, and he wiped his forehead after making it. He always brought out his words slowly and with difficulty, much as you might fancy a machine in the shape of a man would do. Little Jack said his words always sounded as if they were made of wood, and his tongue was a turning-lathe.

"Yes, he is young," said Dr. Jefferies, gravely. He was not an ill-natured man, and not disposed to quarrel with Seth for not having called him in to Tom. "He is young, Mr. Wilkins, very;" and Dr. Jefferies shook his head. And Dr. Jefferies' shake of the head always said a great deal, and in this instance it implied that Mr. Wheatley being so young might, in the rashness and presumption of his ignorance, have half killed Tom, and that it would be too late for him to mend matters. So he followed Mr. Wilkins into the bright clean kitchen, where Tom was sitting by the fire having a little feeble talk with Jack.

It did not suit Dr. Jefferies to recognise Tom as his nephew. As I have just said, he was not an ill-natured man, but he considered that he had his professional position to maintain, and his wife had taken a great deal of trouble to instil her own exalted notions into his head, so he took no more notice of Tom than if he had never seen him before, but sitting down by his side felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, and then shook his head.

"Hum, ha!—our pulse is very low, and our tongue not at all the thing. Am I to understand that we are still under Mr. Wheatley's care?" said Dr. Jefferies, looking very seriously at Tom. "Well, hardly, sir," said Mrs.Wilkins, cheerily.

Dr. Jefferies' shake of the head never frightened her. "He told me yesterday that he did not see that he could do much more for him; all he wanted was kitchen physic now."

"Kitchen physic!—ah!—time enough for that in a fortnight's time," said Dr. Jefferies, looking at Tom more gravely than ever. "A little mutton broth now, very weak, would not be amiss—that's if he'd the appetite to take it, which I should doubt. Now, what has he had to-day?"

"A half-pound mutton-chop!" said Jack, at the top of his voice. "Dick and I went to buy it, and Tom eat it every bit but the bone, and looked as if he wanted more. And he'd roast fowl yesterday, and if he goes on well he's to have roast beef to-morrow," added Jack, with a triumphant nod; "and I'm to turn the spit, that it don't burn."

Dr. Jefferies looked overpowered! The way Tom was being treated was so completely opposed to all his notions of the manner in which a patient should be dieted. He shook his head with more emphasis than ever, and said in his most solemn tone—

"Mrs. Wilkins, you'll kill us if you go on like this. We are not in a condition to stand it. We——" But here Dr. Jefferies was interrupted by Jack, who had been scanning him curiously

while he was speaking, and who now shouted out, "I know you; you're my uncle! What a time it is since you've been to see us!"

Dr. Jefferies thought it best not to hear Jack's remark, and was proceeding to inform Mr. Wilkins that, "we were not in a state to be fed upon mutton-chops and roast beef," when Jack continued, "I saw aunt last Sunday, but she didn't see me, and Fred made believe he didn't neither; but I know he did, for all that."

Dr. Jefferies thought it best to beat a retreat. Little Jack was too much for him; so he looked at his watch, and murmured something about being in a hurry, and then took his departure. Mrs. Wilkins tried to look grave, and told Jack he was a naughty little chatterbox, but as she gave him sugared bread-and-butter for tea, I don't think she could have been very angry with him. As to Mr. Wilkins, he returned to his workshop, feeling very thankful he had consulted the doctor, and wondering how it was he had never found out he was so ill before.





CHAPTER IX.

HOW DOCTOR JEFFERIES PHYSICKED SETH WILKINS— JACK TELLS HIS UNCLE HIS NOTIONS OF DOCTORING.

R. JEFFERIES sent Seth Wilkins plenty of physic, which in spite of his wife's counsel he persisted in taking; but he did not come to see him for a week. Mrs. Wilkins said little Jack had frightened him away. At the end of that time he appeared in the workshop and found Mr. Wilkins at work, though not looking half so well as he had done when the doctor first called; but this was not at all an unusual thing with Dr. Jefferies' patients.

The doctor inquired whether Mr. Wilkins had duly swallowed his draughts, rubbed in his embrocation, applied his blisters, and, above all, whether he had let the leeches suck their fill.

"They are such famous creatures," he said; "I'm very partial to them. And we kept them on, did we, as long as they'd bite?"

Seth nodded mournfully. He was a most

obedient patient, and took his physic as if it was a pleasure to him; and as to the leeches, he let them work their will upon him as long as they pleased, and resented it as a personal affront when Mrs. Wilkins, in her anxiety for him, would have cried "Hold! enough." Any doctor really ought to have been satisfied with such a patient. but Dr. Jefferies had been brought up in the good old school of Dose and Drench, and Mr. Wilkins was not half bad enough to please him yet. Where would be the credit of curing a man unless he was as bad as he well could be? And if he was not bad enough to make a good cure when he fell into the doctor's hands, the only thing the doctor could do was to half kill before he cured him. So Dr. Jefferies told Seth Wilkins he would send him in some more draughts, a couple of blisters, another embrocation, and half-a-dozen more leeches, and Dick had better come for the different articles in the evening. Then he added—

"How is the lad you showed me the last time I was here? I hope Mrs. Wilkins has been keeping him upon low diet; and, indeed, in the state he was in he was much fitter to be in his bed than downstairs. Is he any better than when I last saw him? No cold? no inflammation?"

"Tom's as right as a trivet," cried Jack, who was playing with a heap of shavings in the corner. "Mrs. Wilkins and I took care of him. And he drinks two glasses of wine every day all to himself, and eats as much as Dick and me put together. And I heard Mrs. Wilkins say, uncle, that was her notion of low diet, whatever yours might be."

Jack nodded at the doctor, and looking triumphant, went on curling the shavings round his fingers. Dr. Jefferies shook his head more ominously than ever.

"Mrs. Wilkins's over-feeding will bring on an inflammation, which indeed is no more than might be expected. She means it kindly, but what will her feelings be if this boy's death lies at her door?"

"But she isn't going to let him die, uncle," cried Jack, in his shrillest voice. "She promised me she wouldn't, so I'm going away to-morrow. And I heard her say," added Jack, "that Mr. Wilkins is taking physic enough to kill a horse, and that if he'd any common sense, which he hasn't, he wouldn't let you bleed and blister him to death like this."

"Mr. Wilkins," said Dr. Jefferies, gravely, "your wife, like most women, seems fond of talking of what she knows nothing about; if she thinks she can undertake your case better than I——"

"Oh pray, sir," cried Seth, who began to be afraid lest the doctor should desert him, "don't mind the little fellow's nonsense. He's sadly spoiled, I'm afraid; and my wife, yes"— added Wilkins, with a shake of the head as solemn as the doctor's own—"yes, she is apt to say what she should not upon such points; it's the one thing—I may say the only thing—we don't quite agree upon."

And then poor Seth, who felt very weak and nervous, as indeed well he might, considering how faithfully he had swallowed all the doctor's draughts, and dieted himself according to his rules, sat down upon his carpenter's bench and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, looking imploringly at the doctor, as if asking him still to go on with his physicking and blistering, and not to allow him to get well without him. And so Dr. Jefferies, seeing that he was penitent for his wife's misbehaviour, was moved to compassion, and promised Seth an extra draught and blisters of redoubled strength. Then he went away, leaving his patient very grateful, and even more miserable than usual.

Mrs. Wilkins was very much vexed when she heard of Dr. Jefferies' second visit, and did her

best to persuade her husband neither to take his. advice nor his physic, but Seth was firm. In most matters he let his wife have her own way, but as regarded his health he considered that he owed a duty both to himself and his doctor, and so, sorely against Mrs. Wilkins's will, she was obliged to administer the physic, fix the blisters, and apply the leeches, with no other result than seeing her husband grow weaker and weaker every day, till at last, when Dr. Jefferies thought his patient bad enough, he began to try and make him better. But all this time Tom, who had been treated on a very different system (luckily for you young folks, the system which is most in vogue in the present day), was growing stronger and heartier than ever, and before long was able to do his own share of work, as well as supply his master's place to some extent, for the doctor left Seth with little inclination or strength to do anything else but take medicine and submit to his regimen.

Little Jack had returned home, but Mrs. Wilkins promised that he should soon come again and see Tom; and about the middle of February, when Dick's fifteenth birthday was drawing nigh, she said that as both Tom and he had been such good lads lately, they might fetch Jack to spend the day with them, and in the

evening they should have a regale of tea and toast, and hot chestnuts afterwards. They were to get their work done in good time the day before in order to take some sheep hurdles home to a farmer near Ambrose Dunstone's, and then to call for little Jack; and should Mrs. Ambrose—it was scarcely likely she would—but should she ask them to stay to tea, why, they might do so, as nothing had been heard of certain highwaymen who had formerly infested the neighbourhood, since the capture of their horses some months previously, and therefore Mrs. Wilkins was no longer afraid of the boys being out after dark.

Tom and Dick rose early in order to get their work done, and worked hard till three o'clock in the afternoon, when having finished what they had in hand, they brushed themselves up, harnessed the horse, and started off in high spirits. They left the sheep hurdles at Farmer Somers's, whose wife asked them to stop to tea, but hearing that they were going on to Ambrose Dunstone's to fetch Jack, made them promise to bring him back with them. This Tom was very glad to do. Mrs. Somers had been an acquaintance of his mother's, and he was pleased at her taking notice of little Jack. Mrs. Ambrose was glad to see Tom looking so well and strong again. It was

the first time he had been to the farm since his illness; and while Dick and he warmed themselves by the fire in the kitchen, she tidied up Peculiar, and made him, in her opinion, quite smart for company. He had a little frilled collar on, rather old, for it had formerly been Tom's, and it stuck out all round Jack's neck quite stiffly, and his coat was patched at the elbows and worn at the buttons, and left a full inch exposed at his wrists—for Jack was growing fast; but grow as he would his clothes had to last him their time. His trousers were mended at the knees with cloth that did not match the original material very well, and they came only half way below his knees, leaving his little bare legs and his well-mended gray socks fully exposed to view. His boots were the most creditable portion of his attire, for they were really new, but so thick and so studded with large heavy nails that it was wonderful how little Jack could run about in them so nimbly as he did. Altogether, though little lack was in his very best, he was not, as my readers will perceive, altogether in full trim for an evening party. Never mind-little Jack was very happy, healthy, and rosy, and Mrs. Ambrose was quite of opinion that he did her credit; and upon the whole I think he did.

Down he came when his toilet was completed.

"Now then, you fellows! I'm all ready—let's be off as quick as we can."

They were soon in the cart, jogging merrily on to Mrs. Somers's, who had a famous tea for them, and made them heartily welcome. Indeed she would have liked to have kept them all night, but that they knew Mrs. Wilkins would be uneasy if they did not return in good time; and accordingly they started off soon after eight, thinking they should be home in little more than an hour, and having no anticipation of all that, as it happened, befell them on the road.





CHAPTER X.

MRS. JEFFERIES' EVENING PARTY—THE DOCTOR CALLED OUT—A REFRACTORY PATIENT.

OCTOR and Mrs. Jefferies were giving a party that night, a very grand one for Bridgetown, where the parties generally were of a primitive description, and the ladies walked to them in their calashes and clogs, with their maids, or their husbands if they had any, carrying their lanterns for them. It was only now and then, on very grand occasions, that the one sedanchair in the town was in requisition, for the people at Bridgetown were saving folks, and did not like spending too much money on their little dissipations. But to-night the sedan had been going backwards and forwards as fast as its bearers could carry it; for the ladies were wearing their best dresses and turbans, to do Mrs. Jefferies honour, and these needed the protection of the sedan-chair for their safe conveyance to her house.

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Mrs. Jefferies herself was what you boys would call "awfully grand." She had on a purple satin dress and a pale blue turban with a bird of paradise feather in it, and Master Freddy had had his hair curled by the hair-dresser, and wore a new suit of clothes just come home from the tailor, and pumps and white cotton stockings, to say nothing of pale yellow gloves on his hands. Altogether, in his own opinion, Freddy was very well got up indeed, and was certainly a decided contrast to his poor little cousin Tack. Dr. Jefferies too looked very imposing. He had on his best black suit, knee-breeches, and black silk stockings-you will remember, my boys, I am speaking of sixty years ago-and he had on his best company manners too, and was so polite and complimentary, and pleasant and gracious to the ladies that, as they one and all said, "it was quite a treat to see him."

Squire Preston was there with his wife. Mrs. Jefferies was very fond of talking of "my brother, the Squire," and she was very proud this evening to have him there for the good folks of the town to see. And Mr. Brown, the lawyer, with his wife—Tom's other aunt and Mrs. Jefferies' sister, you will remember—had come to the party, so that it was quite a family gathering, with all the gentilities of the town to look on and see how

united the Browns and Jefferies were, and to hear the Squire talk of his lands and his sheep, and admire his wife's garnet ornaments and the real lace trimming of her dress.

What a nice party it was, to be sure! And how pleased Mrs. Jefferies was that the best people in the town had honoured her invitation to "meet my brother, Squire Preston." Even the Rector himself had come, and after tea sat down to a rubber of whist, with Mrs. Preston for his partner and the Squire for one of his opponents. And the Rector, who was a younger son of one of the county families, so seldom went out of an evening, it looked as if he had just come there out of compliment to the Squire, who, after alland Mrs. Jefferies felt very dignified when she thought of this-was the head of another of the county families; not a very wealthy or exalted one it is true, still land is land, and a squire is a squire, and it is something, after all, to feel that you are not only a doctor's wife but a real live Squire's sister. Mrs. Jefferies thought so, and so did Mrs. Brown; but though both these ladies had children of their own, no thought crossed their minds that night of the motherless boys whom their sister had left behind her, and who might have gone to the workhouse, or begged for bread, for any help of theirs to prevent it.

There were some folks there who thought of these children, if they did not. When people attempt to soar too high, other people seem to take a perverse delight in trying to pull them down. There was not a soul in the town but knew that Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown had one nephew who was apprenticed to Wilkins the carpenter, and another who was living on the charity of a distant relation, who was only a small farmer; and even amongst Mrs. Jefferies' guests that night there were some who remembered the existence of Tom and Jack, though their aunts might think proper to forget them. There was one old lady especially-Mrs. General Mauriel—who was cruel enough just before the card-tables were set out to ask Mrs. Jefferies at the very top of her voice how her nephews were getting on, and whether "young Dunstone" was likely to do well at carpentering. Mrs. Jefferies did not appear to hear, affecting to be too busy in arranging the partners for a rubber at whist to know what was said; but she flushed up to her turban, and felt as if she could have shaken Mrs. General Mauriel, as she afterwards told her sister, Mrs. Brown.

But Mrs. General was not easily silenced. She was rather a terrible lady, having a pertinacious way of following up her point, and of sticking to

any question she wished answered; and in right of her late husband having been a general of militia she held her head very high, and wondered what Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown could mean by giving themselves airs just because their brother farmed his own land and called himself a Squire. She had no patience, she declared, with people making themselves ridiculous by pretending to be much greater folks than they really were. At the same time it would have been a terrible affront in Mrs. General's eyes if any one had called her plain Mrs. Mauriel; and she held her state in the little town of Bridgetown, as if she had been a small queen who had settled there for the benefit of her health, and was extremely punctilious and exacting of all the observances due to her position, and generally endeavoured to impress every one with what I really think was her own opinion, that if Oueen Charlotte was the first lady in the kingdom, why, Mrs. General Mauriel was the second

She might have continued her questions but that a diversion was created by Dr. Jefferies being summoned out. A message came from one of his best patients, a well-to-do retired tradesman, much afflicted with the gout, that he had just had an alarming attack, and there were fears of its flying to his stomach if the doctor did

not do his best to prevent it. It was very annoying, every one said, for the doctor to be fetched out just as he was dealing the cards for his first rubber, but there was no help for it, the case required prompt attention, and Mr. Gibson was much too profitable a patient to be neglected: so laying down the cards, Dr. Jefferies left his drawing-room, promising to return to his guests as speedily as possible. He went into his surgery and began equipping himself, putting on his great-coat and thickest muffler, and drawing gaiters over his legs, for the night was cold and it was a muddy walk to Mr. Gibson's. But the doctor felt in want of other protection than that against the cold; he was a nervous, timid man, and had a great horror of going out after dark. and ever since the highwaymen I have mentioned had made themselves so renowned this feeling had increased. It did not matter so much in the town, where a cry for help, if help were needed, could be heard, and where the flickering oil-lamps gave some light, however faint and doubtful; but Mr. Gibson lived at the outskirts of the town, not far from Keyhole Freehold, where some of the worst characters in the neighbourhood were known to dwell; and there were no lamps near his residence, which stood in a walled garden some distance from any tenement but the questionable

ones of which I have spoken. Dr. Jefferies wished with all his heart that Mr. Gibson's attack had come on some hours sooner, and he took out his thickest stick with a large knob at the head, and hoped he should have courage enough, if necessary, to knock anyone down with it, though he felt rather doubtful on that point. Then he put up some medicine which he thought might suit the case, and lastly he took out a double-barrelled pistol. He hoped the very sight of it would frighten away any one who attacked him, for he felt sure he should never have courage to fire it off. And then he started off for Mr. Gibson's, picking his way as well as he could, for it had rained in the morning, and the pavement was still slippery and muddy.

When he reached Mr. Gibson's he found that gentleman very ill, and the whole household anxiously expecting him. As he had come provided with several bottles of medicine, he administered at once the one he thought most suitable; and as the case was one that required sharp remedies, which were things quite in Dr. Jefferies' line, he soon gave his patient some relief. Then he left him, promising tocall round early the next morning, and started on his way homewards.

But he was scarcely outside the wall of Mr. Gibson's garden, when a little ragged girl ran up

to him, and dropping a curtsey said, "Oh, please sir, be you the doctor, for granny's terrible bad with the rheumatiz; and hearin' you'd been sent for to Mr. Gibson's, she's sent to ask if so be you'll go to hur."

"And where does your granny live, child?" said the doctor, trembling all over at the thought of having to keep out longer in the dark, and dreading lest this should be a plan to trepan him.

"It's at 2, Keyhole Freehold, granny is," said the child. "Tozer her name is. She told me to be sure to tell you. You know her very well, she says."

Doctor Jefferies did know Mrs. Tozer a great deal better than he at all wished. She was always sending for him, giving him as much trouble as if she had been the best paying patient on his books, while she never gave him anything else. She was quite learned in physic, would tell the doctor herself what she thought most suitable for her case, and scold him well if he did not send it sharp or strong enough. And to have heard her talk you would have thought that she was obliging the doctor very much by calling him in whenever anything ailed her, and that it was his duty to attend upon her, whoever else might be waiting for him.

The doctor would not have been so prompt to

attend upon Mrs. Tozer as he generally was, but that he stood in mortal fear of her husband. Tozer was a drunken, good-for-nothing old man, who got his living no one knew how, though the parish constable had his suspicions on the subject. He was out at all hours of the night, and the doctor had run against him frequently, and once or twice when he had not been so attentive to Mrs. Tozer's ailments as her husband thought he should have been, he had expressed his opinion on the subject with such force that the poor doctor had quaked in his shoes, and made a mental vow that Mrs. Tozer should have his attendance whenever she wished for it, and swallow as much medicine as she pleased; so now when he heard who it was that required his services he went towards Keyhole Freehold with the utmost promptitude, not daring to refuse, lest the formidable Tozer himself should come after him.

No. 2 was the most wretched of all the tenements designated as Keyhole Freehold. The door by which the doctor entered had to be pushed open by main force, as the hinges were broken and rusty. There was a bright wood fire in the wretched room into which they first entered, for Mr. Tozer was not at all particular whose fences or gates supplied him with fuel, but Granny Tozer was not there.

"Gran's biding upstairs," said the girl, "but granfeyther's coming in soon, so I lit the fire for him; an' he'll maybe bring one or two others with him."

Doctor Jefferies quailed at the thought of Tozer's friends. Tozer himself was a terrible person to encounter, but his associates were far worse. Besides, they might be drunk, and they would not have the motive that Tozer had for behaving civilly to the doctor as long as he paid due attention to his wife. But he must visit Granny Tozer now he was here, and he resolved to spend no more time with her than was absolutely necessary, though it was always difficult to get away from the old woman when she once began to talk.

He followed his small guide up the creaking, worm-eaten stairs, which he was always afraid would crumble beneath his feet whenever he trod them, and into the low, small, dirty room where his patient was expecting him. She was sitting by the fire, cowering over it, and with her old red shawl pulled over her head; her sharp features, wrinkled skin, and keen black eyes would have served a painter as a model for a witch. She turned quickly round when the doctor came in.

"An' so here you are at last; I thought you





"He felt her pulse, and made a few inquiries."-P. 111.

was never comin' near me agin. The toimes I've seen you droivin' past, an' never once thought of giving me a look in for all the years I've had you as a doctor, an' all the physic of yours I've taken. I'll have Wheatley in, I will, if you don't use me better; he's a young fellow, an' wants encouragin'. Why, it's three weeks since I got through the last stuff you sent me; and how's a woman at my toime o'life to do without a drop o' medicine pretty often. I couldn't be worse off if I was in the workus."

Dr. Jefferies took all this very meekly; he was used to this style of thing from Mrs. Tozer. Then he felt her pulse, made a few inquiries, but failed to obtain any clear idea of what was the matter with her.

"I suppose it's the rheumatiz, for I've aches and pains all over, an' a sinkin' o' the stomach, 'specially just afore dinner toime, an' a dizziness o' the head that comes on if I only take the least drop o' anythin' to keep the cold out. And so I thought, as I heerd you was a comin' to Mr. Gibson's, I'd just let you know, an' see if you couldn't give me somethin' as 'ud do me good. Happen you've got a bottle o' stuff with you as'll suit me. I ain't partickler as long as it's strong an' comfortin'."

"I've got a bottle of medicine that I put up

before I came out to Mr. Gibson," replied the doctor; "but it's not at all adapted to your case, Mrs. Tozer."

"No, of course it isn't!" cried the old woman, snappishly. "What's fit for Mr. Gibson is much too good for the likes o'me. That's how it is your stuff does me so little good. I may just put up with the washings o' the bottles!"

"Now, my good Mrs. Tozer," pleaded the doctor, for he was becoming nervously anxious to get away before Tozer and his friends came in.

"I'm not good!" cried Mrs. Tozer, and she certainly spoke the truth. "An' I say it's a shame as there's one kind o' physic for the rich an' another for the poor; an' I believe a bottle o' the real good stuff such as you give Mr. Gibson would pretty nigh set me on my feet again. Now do e'e let us have it, do e'e, that's a dear soul," she added in a wheedling tone, stretching out her skinny, wrinkled, claw-like hand for the mixture she coveted.

Dr. Jefferies began to get alarmed. He was fond of strong remedies, but the one in his breast pocket was much too strong for an old woman like Mrs. Tozer, who had scarcely anything the matter with her but sheer old age. He had hesitated to give it to Mr. Gibson, finding the

violence of the attack had somewhat subsided when he came to him, but had substituted the milder draught which he had also brought with him. He would have done a great deal to please Mrs. Tozer and to get away quietly before her husband and his friends came in, but he was not quite prepared to run the risk of having a coroner's inquest held on the old lady, and a verdict of manslaughter brought in against himself for giving her improper medicine. He attempted to remonstrate with her:—

"But Mrs. Tozer, you don't consider—there's belladonna in it."

"The very thing I allers said would suit my case," cried Mrs. Tozer. "I ses to Ben, ses I, if that doctor wud only give me bellydonny I know it 'ud set me up agin; but it's the price I expect that hinders on him. An' Ben ses, ses he, Let me catch him a keepin' anything from you on account of the price, old ooman, an' I'll pay him in a way he don't think for. Ah, he's a good 'un, is Ben!—a good 'un when the drink isn't in his heed. Now, doctor, hand us the bottle, and doant let's have any more pother about it."

"But there's prussic acid in it," cried Dr. Jefferies—"prussic acid, I tell you; do you know what that is?"

"Lor, doctor! is there?" cried Mrs. Tozer, her

eyes sparkling with delight. "Now I've heerd o' that, an' allers had a fancy for it. Why ever didn't you give it me afore?"

"Because it's poison!" cried the poor doctor.

"I tell you there's poison enough in this bottle
to kill you half a dozen times over. Do you
think I want to kill you!"

"No, doctor, no—an' you didn't want to kill Mr. Gibson neither, or you wouldn't have put that bottle o' stuff up for him. You can easy send him another; an' I'm sure I want it the most—now just give it us, an' as soon as Ben's got a day to spare, he'll come an' dig up your back garden for you—"

"I tell you I can't," cried the doctor. "Do you think I want to have your death at my door? Send round in the morning, and I'll let you have something that's really fit for you; but I'd sooner throw this bottle out of window than it should fall into your hands."

He took up his hat, and angrily saying good night was about to leave the room, when the sound of uproarious voices below arrested him. He stopped and turned pale. Tozer had come home, and the friends he had brought with him were evidently tipsy like himself—so tipsy, that they would be likely to stop at nothing, but would be as ready as not first to rob the doctor,

and then maltreat him past all his own powers of physic or plastering to cure.

"Is there no getting out any way but through the room below?" he asked, nervously, turning with a white, scared face to Granny Tozer, who saw his fright and enjoyed it, determining in her own mind to punish him through it for refusing to give her the medicine she had asked him for.

"No, you must go through there—it's the only way," she replied; "an' Ben's brought a rare lot o' roughs home with him to-noight, an' he's got a drop in his head himself, too, by the sound of his voice—else"—and she laid an ominous emphasis on the "else"—"you'd be safe enough; but when Ben's in drink he's as bad as the worst—not that I ever cast it up to him, for he's sorry enough when it's all over; besides, what 'ud be the good of talking to him then?"

Just what the doctor thought—where would be the good of talking to Mr. Benjamin Tozer when he had broken his head and otherwise illused him? The voices below were becoming more and more uproarious; it was evident that the men were in that stage called "quarrelsome drunk," and would be ready enough to leave off attacking each other in order to fall upon the doctor. Go through that room while it held its

present occupants he could not, but things might be worse when they left, if Mr. Tozer came upstairs and heard his amiable lady's account of the manner in which the physic she demanded had been withheld from her. Dr. Jefferies fairly trembled, and Granny Tozer saw it and rejoiced.

"If you'd only a-given me that bottle when I asked you," she said, "you'd have been gone long afore this, and no need to have gone near any on 'em. I shouldn't wonder but Tozer 'll be comin' up in another minnit to see how I'm a-gettin' on; an' when he hears about the stuff he'll be that angry there'll be no holdin' on him. He's a good critter, is Tozer, and can't a-bear to see his poor wife put upon."

"Is there no way out?" asked the doctor. "Isn't there another room I could go into for a while?"

"No, we've only this one upstairs; and there's no other way out but through the window, where you talked of throwing the physic," said Granny Tozer, chuckling maliciously.

Through the window! It opened on the back of the house, so that if it were possible to get out that way, he might escape unseen by those in the room below. It was not *very* high from the ground, would it be possible to drop from it? It was a desperate and not very dignified resource,

but Dr. Jefferies opened the window and looked out to see if it was not practicable.

"You'll have to squeeze through, for you're stoutish, doctor," said Granny Tozer; "but I dunno but it's the best thing you can do. You've got your watch—why ever do you wear it when you go out o' noights? As like as not Tozer or any o' them may take a fancy to it, an' if you doan't give it up quietly there's no knowing what may come of it. Men want a deal o' managin' when they've taken more cider nor they ought."

The doctor saw that he should have a squeeze. and if he did fall head foremost he would be almost worse off than if he remained where he was, and took his chance of Mr. Tozer's maltreatment. While he was hesitating what he had better do, a waggon loaded with hay came near the house, the horses going at an almost funeral pace, while the waggoner was indulging in a nap. The hay was piled so high that it almost reached the bottom of the window. Could he spring upon that (he surely might do it at the pace the horses were going), and so be safely borne away from granny and her affectionate husband? The lane at the back of the cottages was so narrow that the waggon must of necessity pass within a foot of their wall, and the moon shining full and clear gave the doctor plenty of light to see what he was about. He determined to make the effort—fall into Mr. Tozer's hands he would not if possible—anything almost would be better than that. The waggon came slowly on, the waggoner slumbering peacefully the while; the doctor stretched forward out of the window—he could touch the hay with his hand—should he venture it? Granny Tozer settled the question.

"Look sharp, doctor. I do believe Tozer's on the stairs."

Dr. Jefferies pushed himself through the window, and in another second was nestling down in the hay, congratulating himself on his escape and on his being able to return so comfortably into the town, towards which the waggon seemed making its way. He would wake the waggoner when he found himself near his own house, ask him to assist him in dismounting, and then make the best of his way home, where he had no doubt his guests were anxiously expecting him. And, so thinking, the doctor curled himself yet more snugly up in the hay, pulled some tarpauling that was lying on part of it over his shoulders, and before he was aware of what he was about found himself lulled by the slow, regular movement of the horses into a sound, refreshing sleep.



CHAPTER XI.

THE DOCTOR'S ADVENTURE ON BRACKEN COMMON—
LITTLE JACK MAKES HIS APPEARANCE AT HIS AUNT'S
EVENING PARTY.

N went the waggon, lumbering away till it had left Bridgetown some way behind it. The horses knew the road they had to take, and went soberly along without requiring whip or rein from their driver, who slept as comfortably as the doctor did, till the horses made a sudden jolt, owing to some roughness in the road, and so woke them both. The doctor sat up on the top of the waggon, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. Where was he? Not at Bridgetown, that was clear; for the moon was shining full and bright, its rays displaying to the doctor's eye a wide expanse of common, dotted with here and there a tree or a clump of blackberry bushes, and now and then silvering a small pond, where in fine weather children would fish for tittlebats. or older anglers bring out dace and chub.

It couldn't be-could it?-Bracken Common. full four miles from Bridgetown; but it looked very like it, and the doctor's heart misgave him. Bracken Common was the loneliest, dreariest place for miles round; the doctor would not have crossed it after nightfall for any consideration could he have helped it; and now here was he alone with a waggoner, who for aught he knew might be as ready as any of Tozer's friends to help himself to his watch, now that he had such an excellent opportunity of doing so without any let or hindrance but what the doctor himself might give him. Whatever could have made him be so foolish as to go to sleep, when, if he had only had the common sense to keep awake, he might have been back in his own drawing-room by this time, playing a rubber with Mrs. Preston and the Rector? waggoner might be a decent person after all, and willing for a small consideration to take the doctor back as far as Bridgetown—should he try? If he could only see the man's face, and ascertain whether or not he was a stranger to him, he should know better what to do. He leaned forward and tried to look down on the waggoner. who, hearing the rustling of the hay, looked up, and seeing the doctor's face, was naturally angry at his having got to the top of the waggon without permission, and said, in a surly voice—"Who be ye, and how are ye gotten there?"

The doctor tried to explain matters, but the waggoner was in no humour to receive such explanations in as friendly a manner as could have been wished. And he positively refused to go back an inch of the way to Bridgetown; but, stopping the horses, told the doctor he must dismount at once, and get back to Bridgetown the best way he could. "He was going to Lunnon himself, and could na be turning here and there, driving first one way and then the other, just to please folks who thought fit to get into his waggon without even so much as saying, by your leave."

There was nothing for it but to get down, which the doctor did, rather disarranging his attire in so doing, and breaking several of the buttons off one of his gaiters. The waggoner whipped his horses to make them go on faster, and Dr. Jefferies found himself alone on the wide bleak common.

"Very uncivil man—very," he said to himself, "and this place is the worst walking in all Somerset even in daylight; and with nothing but the moon to light me, however shall I pick my way?"

How indeed? The common was more like a

swamp at this time of the year, and the wet, boggy earth gave way at every step beneath the doctor's tread. His shoes were soon wet through, and his gaiters too. On he went, hoping soon to reach the cart-road, a beaten track that ran across the common, and led from Boreham towards Bridgetown, and where he would find firmer footing; but the horses that drew the waggon had not cared to make for this when they came to the common, but struck right across it, that being the nearest way to the village where they should find their quarters for the night; so that he was some distance from it, and the difficulty of walking made his progress extremely slow.

But that was not all; the common had a bad repute, as being the resort of gipsies and poachers, and the doctor did not care to meet any of these just then. He looked nervously around; no one was in sight, for which he felt thankful, and tried to make his way a little faster. But it was of no use, his feet were so clogged and heavy, and the earth seemed to take a pleasure in trying to hold him fast.

"Ugh!" shuddered Dr. Jefferies; "who would be a medical man! I shall be laid up a week after this night's work, and that young upstart Wheatley will be called in to all my patients. There's no getting over this ground. I feel every minute as if I should be up to my knees. Talk of martyrs—I'm sure I'm one to my profession. People speak of leading a dog's life—why, they'd much better speak of a doctor's; being called out every hour of the day and night to attend to other people's ailments, at the risk of getting robbed and murdered, and getting one's death of cold into the bargain. Oh! dear! dear! dear! if there isn't a man coming as fast as he can after me."

So there was, and a very formidable figure he looked in the moonlight, being tall, powerfully made, dressed—as far as the doctor could judge—in the everyday clothes of a working man, but carrying across his shoulder a stout walking stick, which the doctor's fears metamorphosed into a bludgeon;—and what business had any decent working man with that—he wore a flat cap, and his face was tied up with a red hand-kerchief, so as partly to conceal his features.

"He may well try to hide his face," thought the doctor. "He's some good reason, I've no doubt, for wanting to do it. If he isn't coming faster and faster. What a shame it is to keep the common in this state! I can't get over the ground! But that fellow's gaining on me. Oh! good gracious! What's he holloaing for?"

The doctor tried to run, but it was useless. His legs shook under him, and it seemed as if his feet *could* not leave the firm sticky earth which clung so pertinaciously to them. His fears redoubled when the man who was following him cried out, in a peremptory voice, "Hallo! stop there."

- "Not if I can help it," thought Doctor Jefferies, and tried his best to increase the distance between himself and his pursuer, who appeared to be irritated by his doing so; for he cried out, in a louder and more angry voice, "Stop, I tell you—which is the nighest road to Kingsford?"
- "I—I—don't know," cried the doctor, trembling more than ever, and still going on as fast as he could.
- "Which is the way to Kingsford?" cried the man, in a more peremptory tone than before.
- "I—I can't tell. I'm a stranger in these parts," said the doctor, who knew very well that the best way to Kingsford was the track he was himself pursuing.
- "Which is the way to Kingsford?" was repeated in a yet louder voice than before. "Stop, I tell ye."
- "I wont!" cried the doctor, and hastened forward as fast as he could, feeling sure that these pertinacious questions were only an excuse

to cause him to remain still. But his fears were groundless. The man who was following him was only a blacksmith out of work, who had been told that he might obtain employment at Kingsford, and was making the best of his way towards it, and being quite new to the neighbourhood, as he came from a town some distance off, had very naturally asked his way when he felt uncertain whether he was going in the right track. He had been suffering for some days past from a severe cold and face-ache, which was the reason he was so muffled up, and the last day or two had become quite deaf in consequence of it, a fact of which he was not yet conscious himself, and therefore as he had not heard one of the doctor's replies to his questions he considered himself rudely treated, and felt inclined to resent this apparent want of civility. If Dr. Jefferies would only have faced his danger, he would have found after all that there was none to face—not at all an uncommon thing, I can assure you, boys.

"If you don't stop, I'll make you," called out the blacksmith, getting more and more incensed with the doctor's want of good manners, and waving his stick in a threatening manner.

"Of course he will," thought the doctor.

"Break my head with that bludgeon, if he gets

the chance. Where's that pistol? If I can only get it out! I don't want to kill him, so I think I'll try and hit him in the right arm. Here it is. Stand off, I tell you, or I'll fire—I will, if you don't keep your distance."

The blacksmith stared. He was not prepared for this, but not being half so much frightened at the pistol as the doctor was who held it, he came a little nearer and saw that, though pointed at him, it was held upside down, the doctor in his nervous trepidation being quite unaware of the fact; he gave a little contemptuous laugh, twirled his stick rapidly round, and in another second had brought it full on the pistol and dashed it out of the doctor's hand. It went off of itself, and the smoke and explosion were altogether too much for Dr. Jefferies, who was not sure whether the pistol had wounded him or his pursuer, but felt sure that as it had gone off it must have done one or the other. However, wounded or not, he did not feel disposed to stand there a moment longer than he could help, and turned to fly; he made two or three steps, and then missing his footing fell down, breaking the bottle of medicine in his fall, and slightly wounding himself through his shirt and waistcoat with one of the sharp edges of the pieces of glass.

"I'm hit," he groaned; "the villain's done for

me. I don't know—if it's only the pericardium, it's not necessarily fatal. I may be saved yet, if I can only make a run for it."

He picked himself up and tottered forward as fast as he could, just taking one glance back, which added to his terror by showing him the blacksmith with the pistol in his hand.

"Means to fire again! the merciless villain! I must reach the cart track as fast as I can. It's just possible some one may be going that way."

He went forward as fast as he could—the cart track lay clear before him—if he could only reach *that* there was a chance of safety. You may be sure he did not stop to pick his steps now, especially as the blacksmith came running after him, pistol in hand.

"Means to murder me outright, rob me, and throw me into one of these ponds," thought the doctor, and found himself plashing, in his incautious haste, right into one of the very ponds he spoke of. It was by no means a deep one—none of the ponds on the common were—but it was a very unpleasant pond to get into for all that, being tenanted by those especial favourites of the doctor's—leeches. The water was cold, but the doctor never heeded that; it did not come up to his thighs, so he waded through it towards the other side, which was very near the

cart track of the common. His movements were necessarily slow, and they caused a great deal of disturbance to the leeches, who were naturally annoyed at such an unseasonable intrusion. As I have said, some of the buttons of one of the doctor's gaiters had given way, and if the truth must be told, one of his silk stockings had come down, so that a few of the leeches being aroused from their sleep found that there was some chance of supper, and fastened on the leg which was unprotected. The doctor felt their bites, but in his fright never ascribed them to the true cause, but imagined the pistol-shot had wounded him in the leg as well as the breast.

"Even if I've strength to get home," he thought, "I shall be laid up for a month. Why, the whole of the small shot with which I loaded that pistol must have gone into me. It's impossible for me to extract it myself, and I shall have to call in that fellow Wheatley. To think of my having to put myself under his hands, and of his having the credit of curing me! I really feel as if I'd almost sooner not be cured at all than let him do it."

He got out of the pond on the other side by the help of a tree which stood near, and then went towards the cart track with redoubled hope as he heard the sound of wheels. "There's a chance for me now," he thought; "if they're only decent people I may be saved after all. So much for being called out at nights; and I dare say that Gibson will think himself very ill-used if I make any extra charge on account of all this. Oh, dear! oh, dear! if I could only put my own case down in his bill what a long one it would be!"

The cart came nearer; it was an open one. A boy was driving it, and a couple of others were on the seat with him.

"Only boys," thought the doctor. "Well, there isn't likely to be much harm in them, and they'll surely give me a lift if I promise them sixpence. There seems plenty of room behind." He raised his voice as they came near. "Stop—where are you going? Can you take me on to Bridgetown?"

The driver of the cart drew in his horse, and a shrill little voice, which sounded unpleasantly familiar in the doctor's ears, called out, "Why, if it isn't Uncle Jefferies! Hallo, uncle, who'd have thought of seeing you at this time of night?"

"It's that dreadful child!" thought the doctor, as he recognised Peculiar, Tom, and Dick. But there was no help for it. It was much better to ride home in company with little Jack than to

be left behind on the cold, bleak moor; besides, he saw the formidable stranger hastening after him. There was no time to be lost. "Help me in, boys—help me in," he said. "I've been attacked by a highwayman, and had a narrow escape of my life. There he is—don't you see him coming this way as fast as he can?"

He tried to scramble into the cart, and Tom, leaning over, helped him in and placed him as comfortably as he could in the back part of it.

"Drive on, boys! drive on! There'll be murder done if you don't—don't stop for him—don't mind a word he says. I tell you he knocked my pistol out of my hand, fired it off, and I believe I've a dozen shots in every part of my body."

The doctor was shaking and trembling all over, for the stranger was coming fast towards the cart, and once more, in stentorian tones, he shouted out—"Stop! which is the way to Kingsford?"

"Don't mind him, boys!—don't mind him!" cried the doctor, "but drive on as fast as you can, or we shall all be murdered!"

"What! and he's one against four!" cried little Jack, who had a great opinion of his own prowess; "I should like to see him!"

"What's that he's got in his hand?" asked Tom; "he's holding it out towards us."

"I do believe it's a pistol!" cried Jack. "Oh, I say Tom, he's a real live robber!"

"Hallo, there! stop!" cried the man. "Have you got the good gentleman there that this belongs to?" and he held out the pistol as he spoke.

"Don't answer him!—don't answer him!" cried the doctor, "and drive on, do, before he blows all our brains out."

"Why don't you answer one?" cried the stranger. "And can't you tell me the road to Kingsford?"

"Straight before you," cried Dick, and he pointed in the direction of the town as he spoke; and if the blacksmith did not hear the words, he saw the outstretched arm and understood Dick's meaning.

"All right!" he shouted. "I see you've got the gentleman there as this belongs to. Give him this with my respects, and tell him not to be so precious uncivil the next time he's asked a question on the road." He flung the pistol, as he spoke, into the cart, and strode on in the direction of Kingsford.

"Has he gone?" said Doctor Jefferies, looking timidly round; "now do drive on, that's good boys. You may rely upon it he's only gone to

fetch some of his companions. He thought when he saw you all you'd be too many for him."

"I should think we would!" cried Jack. "Don't be afraid, uncle, you're all right now; we'll take care of you;" and Jack drew himself up and looked as if he felt confident in his own capabilities of thrashing a dozen highwaymen if need be. Where did he shoot you, uncle? Don't I wish I'd just seen him."

"Has he hurt you, sir?" asked Dick. "Did he really fire the pistol off?"

"It was fired, whether he did it or not," replied the doctor, testily. "It's wounded me here," and he placed his hand in a pathetic manner on his chest; "and I'm sure by the pain there's half a dozen shots in my left leg. It's quite wonderful how I managed to get from him as I did. But I feel quite faint already with the loss of blood. Would one of you boys pull this gaiter up for me? It's a bad thing for the cold air to get at gun-shot wounds."

Tom was driving, so Dick came to the back of the cart, and stooping down began very gently to pull up the doctor's gaiter.

"Why, you're sopping wet, sir!" he exclaimed; "whatever mess have you been getting into?"

"Oh, I ran into a pond to get away from the villain," cried the doctor. "Anything, you know,

to escape from such a monster, and I'm nearly wet through. I'm afraid, too," he added, ruefully, "I've spoiled my best black breeches. But do be quick, that's good boys, for it's time my wounds were seen to."

He leaned back in the cart quite exhausted and closed his eyes, as if very bad indeed. Tom felt quite concerned for his uncle, and was very much surprised to see Dick take his place by his side looking exceedingly cheerful, as if there was not the slightest occasion for any anxiety. Dick, too, whom he had always thought so good natured. And presently Dick began puffing out his cheeks and screwing up his eyes as if he was enjoying a great joke that he hardly knew how to keep to himself; at last, after looking round and feeling satisfied that the doctor was too absorbed in his own miseries to attend to him, he bent forward and whispered to Tom. "'Tisn't pistol-shots that's the matter with him; he's been in the leech-pond! And oh! I say, ain't some of those little blackies having a feast?"

"What, are they on him now?" cried Tom. "Why didn't you take them off? You'll never leave them to suck away at him like that?"

"Wont I?" said Dick; "he's fond enough of letting them suck away at other people. There's only seven or eight of them, and look how many

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he's sent in to master. Let's see now how he likes them himself."

Tom did not feel disposed to dispute the point with Dick, for he felt rather pleased on the whole that the doctor should suffer a little of the same treatment he was so fond of inflicting on his patients, so he drove on, now and then turning round to see how the doctor was getting on, while Jack amused himself with speculations as to where his uncle had been shot, and whom he would have for his doctor,—"Because you know, Tom, he can't be his own."

"And a very good thing for him, too," said Dick. "Shall we take you right up to your own house, sir?" he added, turning round and addressing the doctor very politely.

"Yes, please," was the feeble reply; "I don't feel as if I could walk a step. We're near the town now, ain't we?"

"Getting nigh, sir," replied Dick; "how do you feel now?"

"Worse than I ever did in my life," groaned the doctor; "getting weaker and weaker every minute."

"Ain't those leeches having a treat?" whispered Dick to Tom. "I hope this'll teach him not to be so fond of giving them to other people."

It was not long before they were at Dr. Jef-

feries' house. The light shone from the parlour and drawing-room windows. Mrs. Jefferies had not had her shutters closed; she liked her neighbours to know that she was having a party. And the doctor looked up to his house.

"Knock at the door, and get me out as quick as you can, that's good boys," he said, faintly; "they'll have to make a bed up for me in the parlour; I shall never be able to get upstairs."

Dick jumped down and gave a thundering rattat, which startled everybody in the drawingroom; they looked at one another in amaze. All the company had come; was it the doctor himself returned, or had anybody else been taken ill, and did they require his services immediately? If so, they must be either very ill, or people of great consequence, for their messenger to give such a knock as that. While these thoughts were passing through the minds of Mrs. Jefferies' guests. and that lady herself was declaring it couldn't be the doctor, but that somebody must be wanting him out again, and how hard it was he never could have a quiet hour at home, or a pleasant chat with his friends, the drawing-room door was flung wide open, and a small boy, with a tattered old collar, a bright rosy face, sharp keen little eves, and patched clothes much too small for him, walked boldly in, and going straight up to Mrs. Jefferies, said, "It's all right, aunt; we've got him."

Mrs. Jefferies' heart sank within her. Was this shabby little boy that called her aunt, really her own sister's child? And who was it he had got? Mrs. Brown felt almost as uncomfortable as her sister, but Mrs. General Mauriel was delighted with the scene.

"Who are you, my good little man?" she said.

"Little Jack Dunstone,—Tom Dunstone's my brother, and I've come to tell Aunt Jefferies we've got uncle outside; picked him up on the common when he was running away from some fellow that frightened him. Why, there's Uncle Preston," said Jack, looking round him, "and Aunt Brown! I say, Fred, if you hit me again, do you know what Tom says?"

"What, my dear?" said Mrs. General, patting Jack's head encouragingly; and then, addressing the company with a benevolent smile, added, "What an intelligent little fellow!"

"Why," he says, replied Jack, "that if ever Fred hits me again, he'll give him such a drubbing as'll take some of the nonsense out of him; and he will too," continued Jack. "He always keeps his word, Tom does."

"Will you have some cake, my dear?" said

Mrs. Brown, thinking it best to try and stop the boy's mouth.

"Yes, thank you," said Jack, taking a piece, but keeping it untouched in order to share it with Tom; then he looked up to Mrs. General, and said, confidentially, "Uncle's in such a mess!"

"Is he, my dear?" said that lady, graciously. "How did he get in it?"

"Got frightened by some fellow that came after him, and ran into a pond, so we picked him up, and brought him home in the cart. The man came up to us, but we didn't mind him. He'd know better than to meddle with us, you know."

There was a noise in the hall outside, and presently Dr. Jefferies appeared, supported by Tom and Dick. He looked very different indeed to what he had done when he had gone out two hours previously, and sinking down in a chair, murmured—

"I've been waylaid by a ruffian, and wounded in half a dozen different places!"

Mrs. Jefferies shrieked; but the Rector, who was not quite so much alarmed as she was, went up to the doctor, and said, "Where has he hurt you, my dear sir?"

"Here—in the pericardium, and in the leg. If I've one shot in me I'm certain I've a dozen," said the doctor, faintly.

Mrs. Jefferies began to consider whether as an affectionate wife it was not incumbent on her to faint. Mrs. General Mauriel observed that the pistol did not appear to have done any damage to the doctor's coat. Jack quietly pushed a piece of his cake into Tom's hand, and another portion into Dick's, and began munching the rest composedly, and the Rector unfastened the doctor's outer garments, and addressing the Squire, said, "If the ladies will stand back we'll see the extent of the damage."

The ladies drew away, and began to condole with Mrs. Jefferies, all excepting Mrs. General Mauriel, who said she was a soldier's wife, and might be of some use. When the Rector unbuttoned the doctor's coat he saw a dark stain on his light waistcoat which looked ominous. Mrs. Jefferies caught a glimpse of it, and shrieked—

"He'll never get over it—he can't! Look!—look!—his waistcoat is saturated with his blood!"

"I never saw blood of *that* colour," said Mrs. General, looking round composedly. "It's my belief it's physic."

The Rector unfastened the waistcoat, and out tumbled the remains of the fatal bottle which had been the origin of all the doctor's troubles. Mrs. General picked up the fragments, and held them up—

"It's only a mistake the doctor's made. He's half-killed himself with his own physic—that's all."

"Ah, dear, then it was into my leg the villain fired," murmured the doctor. "It's a good thing for me if all the shots did go there. I may get off with only being lamed for life."

Mrs. General glanced at his gaiters. "There's something wrong there," she said; and stooping down unfastened the one on his left leg, thinking the while what a poor helpless creature Mrs. Jefferies was, not to be seeing to her husband herself. "By the look of things I should fancy he is hit here," she said to the Rector, "and if so, we'd better send for Wheatley at once." In another minute she saw what it really was that had wounded the doctor, and giving a sharp cry, started back.

"The nasty, horrid wretches! If the doctor hasn't got half a dozen of his own leeches on!"

Every one forgot their politeness and gentility, and burst into a loud laugh, above which little Jack's shrill voice was heard:—

"Ah! he's always saying he's so partial to them."

This seemed more than Mrs. Jefferies could bear. She boxed Jack's ears, and asked him how he dared insult her husband, and desired Tom, Dick, and him to leave the room directly.

They did so at once, Tom taking hold of Jack's hand, and saying, in a quiet but very audible voice, "I am quite as ready as you, ma'am, to forget you were my mother's sister. Did she hurt you, Jack?" he whispered, when they were once more in the cart.

"Not much—I didn't mind," said Jack, nestling up to Tom.

Dick took the reins and drove off, saying, as he did so, "What a nice set of relations you've got to be sure, Tom!"





CHAPTER XII.

JACK'S ADVENTURE WHEN HE WENT TO BUY THE TEA-CAKES—TOM GIVES MASTER FREDERICK A LESSON.

RS. JEFFERIES called on Mrs. Brown the next morning, and the two consulted together as to what had better be done to erase from people's minds the very unpleasant impression little Jack's appearance at the party, and his recognition of them as relatives, must have. They hardly knew what to do; as they said, people had such tongues, and were always so fond of abusing their neighbours, and Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown, being the chief leaders of society in the place, were sure to be considered fit subjects for all the ill-natured remarks that could be made about them. They were both of them very much vexed with the whole affair; and as they could do nothing else, began finding fault with their late sister for marrying a farmer, and with her husband for dying so badly off, and leaving his children "to disgrace every respectable person who had the misfortune to be connected with them."

They both felt a great deal better after they had gone on in this strain for about half an hour, and then they resolved to have nothing further to do with their two nephews, but to persist in the system they had adopted of ignoring their existence completely, and to hope that by so doing other people might be led to forget that Seth Wilkins's apprentice, and that horrible little creature whom Ambrose Dunstone was keeping out of charity, were in any way related to the two chief ladies of Bridgetown. Then Mrs. Jefferies called in her Frederick, and Mrs. Brown her Augustus, and they severely cautioned these young gentlemen against having anything to do with those very low boys, the young Dunstones -who it was very clear were not at all fit company for any respectable, well-brought up lads.

Fred and Gussy promised obedience, and then they were told they might, if they pleased, go out together for a little stroll, but to be sure to come in to tea in good time, as Mrs. Jefferies was to stay and partake of that meal with her sister.

Away the two went. They had been charged not to get into mischief, and to have nothing to say, not only to the young Dunstones, but to any

other boys of a similar class. Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown would both have been very much shocked had either of their sons associated with "tradespeople's boys:" and both Master Frederick and Master Augustus were very ready to adopt all their mammas' exalted notions; having a great opinion of themselves and of their own personal consequence. Augustus, however, was not altogether a boy to be trusted. He thought it a fine thing to be a solicitor's son, and was looking forward rather proudly to being an articled clerk, though he was not to become one till he was sixteen, which would not be for two years to come. Still, when a fit of mischief came upon Augustus he was apt to forget his dignity, and behave himself in rather an eccentric manner. There was a curious method about him too. Let him be concerned in whatever he might, he never forgot to take care of his clothes; and though he was often seen in places where he had no business to be, and engaged in pranks that would have made his father exceedingly angry had he known of them, no one ever surprised Master Augustus Brown out of doors without his gloves. He might be guilty of many improprieties, but not of that. Augustus would have thought himself insulted had you even hinted at such a thing. He was not a bad boy—not by any means so

bad as might have been expected. Willing enough to do a good-natured turn when it gave him no particular trouble to do it; not so truthful as he should be, which was a serious thing; but then truth-telling had never been particularly inculcated upon him. His mamma had taken great pains to teach him to be polite, to take off his hat whenever he met a lady, and to give her the wall as a matter of course; to take care of his clothes. and to put them on neatly; and having attended to these very important points she left the rest to take care of itself, thinking she did all that was necessary in sending Augustus to a very "genteel" school, from whence tradesmen's sons were carefully excluded, and in taking him with her to church every Sunday.

Fred was a much worse boy than his cousin, cruel and hard, as well as thoughtless and mischievous; one whose faults you felt would ripen in time, and might be developed into crimes. Gussy was always worse when with his cousin—as much worse as he might have been better if his mamma would have let him associate with plain, honest, good-hearted Tom Dunstone.

The two boys walked on together, Fred with his hands in his pockets, Gussy twirling his little cane round and round, and they soon came near old Quarle's house. They were quite as ready,

for all their gentility, to play the old miser a trick. as would have been any of the "tradesmen's boys" their mammas had so warned them against. The only question was, What should Should they imitate the postman's it be? knock, and then run away? The chances were that the old man would not trouble himself to come, being so used to have his knocker taken liberties with that he had quite given up going to the door; and even when the postman did come, he had to thrust the letters he brought under the door, as he never could get Mr. Quarle to open it to him. Gussy and Fred knew something of this, so that they considered knocking would be of no use. Should they throw stones at the windows? That might have done very well, only there was no glass left in any of them to break, they had been so often pelted, and the old man had lately taken to securing the lower windows with shutters, so that there was no peeping through them, or amusing themselves by calling him names or paying him personal compliments. No; it was very unfortunate, but there seemed no getting any fun out of Jacob Quarle that day, which was rather hard, as there appeared no other bit of mischief in the way. Nothing at all to divert them—nothing; till by good luck as they thought it, they saw little Jack coming along by himself. He had been sent out to buy cakes for tea. Tom and Dick were very busy, and their master could not conveniently spare them; so little Jack, who was by this time sufficiently familiar with the town, was despatched for the tea-cakes, which were a regale in honour of Dick's birthday, after which, when work would be over, they were to have oranges and roast chestnuts.

Gussy had no particular feelings either in Jack's favour or against him. Of course he did not care to have anything to do with a little fellow who was so shabbily dressed, especially as his mamma considered him not genteel enough for his acquaintance; but he would have contented himself with passing him by as beneath his notice, and done him no further injury than regarding him with contempt (which I am inclined to think would not have hurt Jack very much), if he had not had Fred with him. But, unluckilv. Fred was with him, and his sentiments towards Tack were by no means of the same calmly disdainful kind as those that superb young dandy, Gussy, entertained towards him. He had not forgiven Tom the blow he had struck him for ill-using lack, but it was not very easy to punish Tom, unless in the person of his little brother; and here was Jack, alone, walking towards him, as if

for the very purpose. And Frederick had other wrongs to avenge. Jack had annoyed him very much by accosting him familiarly on several occasions. He evidently would not forget that Master Frederick Jefferies, who in right of his papa's being a doctor, felt himself entitled to look down upon every tradesman in the town, was his cousin—his—that shabby little creature, whose father was a farmer, and who was now actually being maintained out of charity; and Fred had been very much annoyed at school on Jack and Tom's account. He was not nearly so popular as Gussy, and the boys finding that his cousins were a sore subject with him, took a malicious pleasure in taunting him with them. It would be, "How's your cousin the carpenter, Jefferies?" and then they would imitate the grating of a saw; or, "Jefferies, when you're a doctor you'll be able to give your cousin a lift. He'll do well if he has to make coffins for all you kill;" or, "What sort of a farmer's boy does your little cousin make, Jefferies? When will he be big enough to follow the plough?" And all this was very annoying to Fred, who would have been quite as pleased as his mamma that every one should remain in ignorance of his poor relations.

And here was little Jack coming, with nobody

to protect him or take his part, and nobody likely to do so either; for Quarle's house was at the extreme end of the street in which it was situated, and at no time of the day were there many passers-by, but especially not at the close of the afternoon. Nobody in sight but little Jack, and little Jack coming on quite unconscious of the danger that threatened him. He came nearer and nearer, so busy thinking how many pieces each cake would cut up into, and how much that would be for each person's portion, that he never noticed his cousins till he felt Fred's hand on his neck and heard him say, gruffly, "Now then, young fellow, what mischief are you after?"

Jack looked up, and struggled to get away, but it was not very easy to do so. Fred held him fast, and began asking Gussy what they should do with him, to which Gussy replied by making most horrible faces at poor little Jack, which however had not the slightest effect on that little hero's nerves; for he looked Gussy coolly in the face, and said, "You needn't make yourself any uglier than you are, Gus."

"Where are you going to, you impudent little monkey?" cried Fred, giving Jack a shaking.

"Sha'n't tell," replied Jack, holding his money tightly, for fear it should drop out of his hand through Fred's ill-treatment.

"How dare you speak like that to gentlemen?" said Gussy, loftily. "It's time you were taught manners, young Impudence."

"Then I sha'n't come to you to teach me," replied Jack; "for Mrs. Wilkins says you're the two worst behaved boys in the town, and it's a great pity Uncle Jefferies and Uncle Brown don't know half the tricks you're after."

"Upon my word," said Master Gussy, "you're a nice boy to talk. I've two minds to give you a thorough good caning."

"I'll tell Tom if you do," said Jack, with one of his most emphatic nods.

"You will, will you?" cried Gussy, and gave Jack one or two rather sharp cuts with his cane, which made the little fellow wince, though he was too proud to cry out. But this was not enough for Fred, who told Jack that unless he would tell them where he was going, and beg their pardon for his impudence, they would tie his legs together and his hands behind his back, and leave him to get on as well as he could.

Jack was not so easily frightened as they thought for. He stuck himself against the wall of old Quarle's house, and declared he would tell them nothing—"no, nor beg your pardon neither, see if I do."

"Then we'll tie your legs together, and you'll

have to stop here all night very likely," said Gussy, flourishing his little cane in Jack's face as he spoke, while Fred kept up a series of shakes and bumpings against the wall, which were anything but agreeable to the young person upon whom they were inflicted.

"No I sha'n't," said Jack, undauntedly, though the cane made him blink his eyes all the time he was speaking, and his words came out in spasmodic gasps, owing to the shaking. "No, I sha'n't, for Tom's sure to come and see after me; and I shall tell him all about it, and wont you catch something if he catches you, that's all!"

"Oh, come, it's time you were taught how to behave yourself, young fellow," said Gussy. "Have you got any string about you, Fred?"

"Quite enough to settle him with," was the reply; and Fred produced some stout whipcord from his pocket, and, while Gussy held Jack tightly pinned against the wall, proceeded to secure his poor little legs, tying the cord so tightly that, brave as Jack was, he could not repress a cry; then they seized hold of his hands and tried to tie them together. Jack cuffed and fought as hard as he could, but his efforts were unavailing against foes so much older and stronger than himself, and then Jack began to use his voice, threatening his opponents with all kinds of evil

unless they desisted in their attacks upon him. They only laughed, and proceeded in their efforts, telling him when they had tied his hands they would see how he could dance. Poor little Jack began to cry—he was such a small boy, you know, and there was none to help him, but he kept his money tightly held in his hand, torment him as they would. Fred saw this, and asked him what he had there.

"Sha'n't tell you," said Jack, sullenly.

Then Fred drew the cords tighter round Jack's wrists, till he shrieked again with the pain, when his amiable cousin demanded—

"Well, will you tell us what you have got there now?"

"No," cried Jack, though the tears were running down his face. "Oh! don't I wish Tom was here, that's all!"

"Ah! but he isn't," said Fred, and drew the cords tighter still, so that poor little Jack screamed louder than ever.

Then these two nice boys retreated to a little distance, and told Jack to show them how he could dance, and Gussy began poking him all over with his cane. The cords hurt the little fellow's hands, and he cried louder than ever. He was such a mite, and his two persecutors seemed so big and hard and pitiless, and Tom.

was far away, and there seemed no other help at hand. No other help—so Jack thought; but presently aid came when least expected. The shutters of the window of Quarle's house which was just above Jack's head, opened, and a long, thin arm and claw-like hand protruded, and seizing little Jack by the collar pulled him in through the window. The shutters were then quickly closed, and Jack found himself in darkness, just made visible by the glimmer of a very thin rushlight.

When his eyes got accustomed to the gloom he discerned the figure of old Quarle, with his dog by him. Jack felt more frightened than he had done even of Fred and Gussy. There were such strange stories told of the miser's house, and the ghosts and "bogies" that haunted it, and there was no knowing what these might do to him, while Fred and Gussy could but beat and ill-use him. And for what had the old man brought him there? To hide him in one of his dark cellars?—to keep him as a little slave?—or to give him as a peace offering to the ghosts to keep them from flying away with himself?

The old man soon set Jack's mind at rest, for he brought the light near, and seeing that he was bound undid the fastenings very gently, Shock meanwhile looking on and watching the process with great attention, and then asked Jack what his cousins had been doing to him. Jack was reassured by the tone of the old man's voice, and acquainted him with all that had passed, adding, "It's time I got the tea-cakes, too, for Mrs. Wilkins told me not to be long gone, for it was nearly tea time; and Tom don't like waiting for his tea, you know."

Quarle opened the window and looked out. "They're gone," he said; "I think you may go on now. Or stay; I wanted to go to the baker's myself.—Ah, dear, what a frightful price bread is now, my child! I'll take my hat and stick and go with you."

By the light that came in when the shutters were opened, Jack was able to look about and see the room they were in. It was very large, and had been handsome in its day. The old mantelpiece was of carved oak, with curious heads staring from it that looked to Jack as if they would have liked to eat him alive; the wainscoting was of oak too, ornamented here and there with clusters of fruit, or heads like those on the mantelpiece, but it was all begrimed with dust and dirt, while from the lofty ceiling great cobwebs hung like a dreary mockery of drapery. There was no furniture in the room, but the old man's hat was placed on the top of a

dwarf cupboard which fitted into one of the recesses. He put it on, and, closing the shutter, blew out the light, and then leading little Jack by the hand guided him to the door, and then the two went away towards the baker's.

Jack bought his tea-cakes and the miser his loaf, and the two returned together, Quarle volunteering to see Jack home lest Gussy and Fred should set on him again. It was well that he did so, for while they were yet some distance from Seth Wilkins's those two amiable youths sprang out, and began pelting Jack and his protector vigorously, taking care, however, to keep a very safe distance from the old man's stick.

Quarle cowered beneath the shower of stones. Shock barked, but that did not seem of much use, but presently he was roused to stronger measures, for Gussy seized the loaf which the miser was carrying, and began dancing in the middle of the road with it in his hand. This was too much for Shock; he seemed to be quite as well aware as his master that bread was a very precious thing, for he flew after Gussy and seized him by the tail of his coat as if he would have torn it off his back. Round and round went Gussy, dancing in quite another fashion to what he had intended, and afraid every moment lest

the dog should leave his coat to attack his legs. He threw the loaf from him; it hit Fred, who was just coming to his friend's assistance, full in the eye, but fell near Quarle, who picked it up and began looking carefully over it to remove any impurity it might have contracted through touching the earth.

Fred began to rub his eye, for the corner of the loaf had hit it rather hard. Jack looked up at him with anything but a sympathizing face, and said, "You got something then, didn't you, Fred?"

This was enough for Fred. The blow from the loaf had irritated him, but Jack's remark and the smiling face with which he said it, irritated him still more. He struck the child with his open hand, and would have repeated the blow, but found himself seized by a hand a little stronger than Jack's, while another equally powerful began pommelling him unmercifully.

"Gus! Gus!" he cried, "come here for a minute, can't you!"

"I will if you'll call off this dog," cried Gus, who began to fear lest his best great-coat should be torn into ribands.

Fred's assailant was Tom Dunstone. Dick and he having done work, had been told they might run out and meet Jack, who seemed a long time coming; Mrs. Wilkins, indeed, was beginning to fear lest he should have lost his way, though, as Tom told her, "Jack knew better than that." It was well, however, that they had come, for old Quarle, despite his stick and his superior size, could have done little to defend the child.

It was really a pleasure to see the way in which Tom thrashed Fred, he did it so thoroughly; and I am sure, my boys, you'll agree with me, that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. Tom thought so, I can assure you, whenever fighting was in the case; not that he was particularly fond of it, looking upon it, indeed, as rather an unpleasant thing, and one to be avoided if possible; but still unpleasant things have to be done sometimes, and we have no right to avoid them just because they are unpleasant, or however much they may be against our natural inclinations. We must act like Tom, and if anything has to be done, do it to the best of our power, however much we may dislike the duty. And no one, to have seen Tom that day, would have suspected that fighting "was not," to use his own expression, "much in his line."

Fred roared and cried for mercy, and then tried to hit back again, but what could he do against Tom?—against Tom, who struck not for

himself, but for the little fatherless and motherless brother whom Fred had so ill-treated. Then he winced and cowered, and promised never to strike Jack again, but Tom hit on; he knew what the promises of one like Fred are worth, and that nothing but fear would induce him to keep them. At last, when he was fairly tired himself, he desisted, and flung Fred from him, saying—

"There, Jack, I don't think he'll hit you again for one while; and if ever you do," he added, addressing Fred, "mind I'll serve you twice as bad as I've done to-day."

"I should say you're tired, Tom," said Dick, who had been looking on the whole proceedings with great complacency.

"I don't know about that," replied Tom; but I do feel rather stiff in the arm, too."

"I should think you did," replied Dick, "for you've been working away hard enough with it. I say, Master Brown, whatever will your mamma say to your coat?"

Gussy was now free from the dog, but he was surveying his coat very ruefully; Shock's teeth had rent the tail in tatters, and it was not till he had no longer anything to hold by that the dog had released his victim. Then he let him go, giving a snap at his legs by way of finale, which

inflicted a tear in the trousers as well as one in the flesh. Altogether, neither Gussy nor Fred had come off quite so well as they could have wished in this encounter, and looking rather crest-fallen they slunk off, leaving Tom and Shock decidedly the masters of the field.





CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH MRS. WILKINS ADVISES HER HUSBAND TO TURN HOUSEBREAKER, AND THE PARSON APPROVES OF THE IDEA.

ACK'S stay at Mr. Wilkins's was rather a long one this time, though he had already so recently been a visitor at the carpenter's. Mrs. Wilkins, when she sent for him, had told Tom that he was to tell Mr. Ambrose, Jack would remain till Dick or he was driving that way, unless Mr. Ambrose happened to be coming to Bridgetown, when he might take him home with him. But more than a week elapsed, and Mr. Wilkins had no business to take his apprentices over to Boreham; and, as Mrs. Wilkins said, it was not worth while to have the horse out just to take little Jack home, while Ambrose Dunstone, when they fetched the child, had said that he did not expect to be in Bridgetown for a fortnight; perhaps Mrs. Wilkins was in no hurry to part not then. with Jack; she had no living children of her own, having lost the only one she had ever had when it was an infant, and so seemed to think it incumbent on her to give other children the love she might have lavished on her own if she had had them. "The master" liked Jack too. He was a quiet, handy little fellow, never meddled with the tools in the workshop, and was always ready to run errands or make himself useful in a small way. And Jack, you may be sure, was glad enough to stop—glad enough to be anywhere with Tom. Mrs. Wilkins said she should be afraid to send him out by himself after his cousins' ill-treatment of him, but Jack said he was not afraid, Tom had taught "those fellows" they'd better not meddle with him.

So it seemed at first, for once or twice Jack encountered Fred or Gussy, and they let him pass in silence, Gussy making a queer grimace or two, while Fred walked sulkily on, looking as if he had by no means forgotten the beating Tom had inflicted on him. "All the better for me if he hasn't," thought Jack.

Old Quarle had walked all the way to Seth Wilkins's the evening that he had encountered Gussy and Fred, and Mrs. Wilkins, who was standing at her garden door and on the look-out for them, seeing that he looked pale and ill, and hearing something of what had happened from

Jack, who ran on first, asked the old man to come in and have a dish of tea. He stammered out a refusal. "Company ain't in his line," whispered Dick to Tom, but Mrs. Wilkins would take no denial, and the old man found himself forced in a manner into the bright, warm, cheery kitchen, and before he was aware of it a cup of tea placed in his hands, while little Jack, kneeling before the fire, toasted the cakes, and told Mrs. Wilkins how Tom had served Fred out. But Quarle would take nothing to eat, and left before the others had half finished their tea, slinking away with his dog behind him as if he felt himself out of keeping in such a happy, cosy-looking place.

"That old man's not right," said Mrs. Wilkins to her husband, when Quarle had left them. "He looks fitter to keep his bed than to go about, this cold weather."

Three or four days passed on and they saw no more of Quarle. A week elapsed, and then there spread a rumour through the town that the miser was dead—must be dead, for he had not been seen for some days in the market-place, and he always laid in his provisions in such small quantities that it was necessary for him to go almost daily for them. Besides, the market-women missed him in another way; if Quarle

did not buy he was always peering about the stalls, asking prices, and rating them for being extortionate. The market was such a favourite haunt of his, something must be wrong, or he could never have stayed away from it for a week.

Mrs. Wilkins came home from her marketing quite full of this one day, and she could talk of nothing else all dinner-time. It was such a dreadful thing, she said, to think of the poor old man lying like that in a great desolate house with neither wife nor child to see to him. Some one ought to break into his place and look after him. To think of a poor creature dying in such a way!

"I suppose if there's nothing seen of him in a day or two, the mayor will send the constable to the place," observed Seth Wilkins.

"A day or two!" cried Mrs. Wilkins, angrily; "why the poor fellow may be dead in that time, if he isn't already. It's really quite shameful that nobody goes to see after him."

"Well, Rebecca, but it's nobody's business," replied Mr. Wilkins.

"Then it ought to be everybody's," retorted his wife. "I wonder at you, Seth, I do, to sit there swallowing your dumplings and talking in that cold-blooded way of the poor old man." "But, my dear, I'm really no worse than my neighbours," remonstrated Mr. Wilkins.

"Then why don't you try to be better, Seth?" said Mrs. Wilkins. "As if it was enough for any of us to be no worse. If I were you, I'd take the boys and a ladder after dinner and try if I couldn't get in and see how the poor old man is going on."

"Why, Rebecca," said Mr. Wilkins, laying down his knife and fork in sheer amazement at his wife's audacity, "that's housebreaking."

"Then please let me be in it, Mr. Wilkins," cried little Jack, laying down his knife and fork also, and clapping his hands with delight.

"We could easily get in, sir, at one of the upper windows, by fixing a tall ladder against it," said Tom, who was anxious, if he could, to repay Quarle in some manner for his kindnesses to him in his illness.

"And if the windows are fastened a screw-driverwill soon undo them," observed Dick; "and every one of the panes is broken all ready for us."

Mr. Wilkins looked around in hopeless bewilderment. Here was his wife, the quietest, best conducted woman in Bridgetown, suggesting that he should take a ladder in broad daylight for the purpose of breaking into a house, and his two apprentices—good, steady lads as need be. generally speaking—evincing the utmost anxiety to be allowed to have a share in the transaction. And the worst of it was that he knew very well that whenever his wife had made up her mind a thing ought to be done, she never rested till it was done. He should have to leave his workshop, just too at a time when business was so bad that there really was not an hour to spare from it. for work as hard as you would there was no making both ends come together; and to take his two apprentices with him to carry the ladder, and have little Jack trotting by his side, and go to old Ouarle's house for the purpose of forcing an entrance !—a house that no one but the owner had entered for the last twenty years, till little Jack was lifted in through the window the other day. He wiped his forehead nervously, and looked at his wife as if to see if there was no hope of her changing her mind, but she seemed to consider the affair settled; for giving Tom and Dick another dumpling a-piece, she observed-

"Be quick and finish your dinners, that's good boys, and then run off with the master at once. Jack, I think you'd better not go. A child like you has no business to be climbing up ladders." There was no help for it, Mr. Wilkins felt. Go he must, and he was just about to get out his longest ladder, which being seldom required in his business was put away behind a number of boards, when Dick exclaimed—

"Here's the parson, master, a-coming up to the house."

The parson! Wilkins for once in his life looked pleased. No doubt the parson was coming after something in Seth's line of business, but at the same time he might as well be told of something that was certainly much more in his way than Seth's, who thought the duty of looking after old Ouarle was far more incumbent on the authorities of Church and State, as represented by the parson and the mayor, than on himself. So he hastened to the workshop in order not to keep his visitor waiting, for the parson was a justice of the peace, and the living of Bridgetown was a very good one, and altogether the portly gentleman who held it was a much more important personage than the little quiet old minister of the chapel.

"Good day — good day, Mr. Wilkins," said the Rev. Laurence Trevor, as Seth Wilkins entered. "And how's business doing? Fuller of work than ever, eh?"

Seth groaned and looked misery itself, as Mr.

Trevor knew he would when he asked the question.

"It scarcely pays, sir—it scarcely pays for keeping the shop open. Indeed, I think I'm getting out of pocket by it every day. I really feel sometimes as if I should do better to shut up altogether."

"Glad to hear you're doing so well in the world," said Mr. Trevor in his cheeriest tone. "So you've made your fortune at last, eh? So you ought—so you ought, at the prices things have been, and the custom you've had. Well, I'd brought you a small order, but I suppose as you've done so well you'll scarcely think it worth your while to have it."

"No, sir, no," said Seth, "I've not made my fortune, far from it; and as to the order, I shall be very happy to do it as low as any one, though wood's so dear, and prices now-a-days so cutting, that one scarcely gets a living profit out of anything—indeed, I've long given up expecting it," added Seth, wiping his forehead nervously, and looking at Mr. Trevor in expectancy of the order.

It was not a very little one, though the Rector had called it so; but it would take Seth from home that afternoon, as Mr. Trevor wished him to go at once to some fields of his lying a couple

of miles from the town, and give him an estimate of the expense of renewing or thoroughly repairing the fences. He also required some sheep hurdles made, and a dozen rakes and forks against the haymaking time should come on. Seth looked intensely miserable when Mr. Trevor had concluded, and said in his most dismal tone—

"I'll have the horse put to, sir, and go at once to the Long Slope meadows, and you may rely upon it the fences shall be done at the lowest possible figure, and with the best of timber, though it's a job I shall get next to nothing out of; for I do think, sir, if there's one thing in my trade pays worse than another—and they all pay bad enough—it's fencing. I don't think, sir—no, I don't think—that out of fencing one gets, so to say, enough to pay for the wear and tear of the tools used in it."

Then Seth wiped his forehead with the air of a man who had made up his mind to a loss, and the Rector, who quite understood his way, was about to take his leave, when Seth stopped him with—

"I beg your pardon, sir, there's a little matter I should like to speak to you about. It's concerning Jacob Quarle—Quarle the miser, the boys call him—boys will call names, sir, and say things they shouldn't," added Seth, apologizing

mournfully, as if he felt the sins of boys in general rested on his shoulders, and the burthen was too much for him. "He's not been seen in the town for nigh a week, and when he was last here Mrs. Wilkins was observing how ill he looked; and now she's possessed with an idea that as nobody else seems to be a-lookin' after the old man, it's my place to do it, an' has been a proposin', sir—actually proposin'—that I an' my boys should take a ladder an' try an' get in at one of the windows. Now, sir, Mrs. Wilkins is a reasonable woman in most things, but I put it to you whether that's just the right sort of thing for me to do?"

"The master says it's housebreaking," burst in Jack, who had followed Mr. Wilkins into the shop, "and I asked him to take me with him, but Mrs. Wilkins says I'm too small to go up a ladder, but of course being little I could get in at a window that neither Tom nor Dick could squeeze through."

"Mrs. Wilkins is quite right," replied Mr. Trevor; "housebreaking isn't at all a thing for little boys to be concerned in. But it's very kind of your wife nevertheless," he added, turning to Seth, "to be so concerned for the poor old man; and the least you can do, as she is so anxious about him, is to set her mind at rest."

"But, sir," said Seth, nervously, "I thought that perhaps you——"

"Me! oh, dear me, no, Mr. Wilkins; going up ladders is not at all in my line," replied Mr. "Besides. I have not heard of the old Trevor. gentleman's disappearance, so that I don't myself feel any particular anxiety about him. But it seems Mrs. Wilkins does—very good of her, I'm sure; so by all means take the ladder and pay Mr. Quarle a neighbourly visit through one of his windows—that is, if you can't get in at the Good day-good day; you'll let me door. know the cost of those fences some time tomorrow. Good-bye, my little man," he added, addressing Jack, "and be sure you mind what Mrs. Wilkins tells you, and don't begin housebreaking yet awhile on any account."

Then away the Rector went, chuckling to himself as he pictured Seth Wilkins mournfully climbing up the ladder and entering old Quarle's house by force.

"I wonder what the old man will say to him when he gets in," he thought; "give him anything but a welcome, I'll answer for it."

Mr. Trevor himself had not the slightest idea that anything was really wrong with Quarle; if he had he would have directed the constable to obtain entrance through the front door, and he went away much more amused at the thought of Seth climbing up a long ladder to get in through a window than the carpenter was himself. He sat down on a bench with the air of a thoroughly ill-used victim, saying, "I did think the parson 'ud have helped me." When Mrs. Wilkins, followed by Dick and Tom, came in, Seth put the question to his wife, "Whether, as Mr. Trevor had just given him a large order, which would require him to leave home that day to commence proceedings, she expected him to throw it up and leave his business and shop to take care of itself for the purpose of seeing after Jacob Quarle? If she did, why of course there was no more to be said about it; things were bad enough as they were—if she didn't mind their being much worse why let them be—that was all."

But Mrs. Wilkins, though a placid, gentle woman, had a great deal of quiet energy in her, so she very soon settled the matter. The master could go by himself to see after the fences, Dick and Tom would take the ladder, get over the back wall of Quarle's garden, and then see if they could obtain entrance into the house. The parson himself seemed to approve of the plan, and it would be much better for the boys to go at once than to wait till the sleepy old constables

came—especially as Mr. Trevor, though a justice of the peace, had not thought it necessary to employ them. As to the workshop, she would bring her sewing in and mind it herself with little Jack for company, and there was nothing so very particular in hand just then that the two boys could not spare an hour from the business.

Of course Dick and Tom were pleased to go. It was really something to have the chance of peeping in at the old man's house; for Jack's description of the dreary room into which the miser had brought him only made them curious to know if all the apartments of the house were equally desolate. Besides, Tom did not like the thought of leaving the old man, who had done his best to help him in his illness, to die uncared for and unhelped, and so it was willingly enough that he helped Dick pull out the long ladder and put a few tools together in case they needed them to open the window with.

The master charged them to be careful how they went up the ladder, and then began to feel afraid that one, and that one only a boy, at the bottom, would not be enough to steady it while his companion ascended. Then Dick asked should they have Harry Swain with them? Harry he knew could come; he had nothing

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particular to do that day, and he would be of great use not only to keep the ladder steady, but to help carry it to Quarle's, and then to lift it over the wall. So it was settled that if Harry Swain could go with them he should, and Jack was despatched in quest of him, and soon returned with Harry following. Then the three went off together with the ladder, and little Jack stayed behind to help Mrs. Wilkins mind the shop.

It was easy work to get the ladder over the wall of Quarle's garden, for it was not particularly high, and, when they were all three in there, they next proceeded to place it against the back of the house. They had quite dispensed with the ceremony of going to the front door and knocking, knowing very well that Quarle, even if he had been able to open the door, would have let them knock for hours before he would have troubled himself to do so. But they looked curiously round the garden to see what traces it bore of the miser's presence. It had evidently not been cultivated for years. Docks and grass grew thick on the flower-beds, and the neglected unpruned fruit-trees threw their huge branches over what had once been well-kept gravel-paths, but which were now almost as green as the grass plots themselves. It was the very picture of desolation, and the broken windows of the house—for the boys had taken a special delight in evincing their skill in throwing by aiming at them—added to the dreary, wretched aspect of the place.

"Makes one shiver all over to look at it," said Dick. "Now, I say, which of us is to go up? I don't like this job half so well as I thought I should. They do say such queer things about the house. And if the old man himself should be dead, why—why—he might take to walking about it himself. And of all ghosts to meet, fancy old Quarle's!"

"Just what I was thinking," observed Harry.
"I—I—don't like going back, but I think parson ought to have tackled this job himself. It's a regular queer one, and I don't fancy it at all."

"He's been uncommonly partial to you, Tom," said Dick; "and I suppose ghosts—if he is a ghost by this time—don't forget their likings. Perhaps you wouldn't mind going up first."

"No," said Tom, "I don't believe much in ghosts—and don't mean to till I see one; but I think with missis, if we don't look sharp, the old man may be a ghost before long, so I'll go up and try if I can get in at the window."

He had his foot on the first rung of the ladder, when a noise reached the ears of himself and his companions which startled even Tom, and made both Dick and Harry inclined to run away. Indeed, I think they would have done so had it not been for Tom, who simply paused to listen without appearing at all alarmed at the sound.

It was the low, melancholy howl of a dog—of poor Shock himself, and was so low and so dismal that it sounded as if the poor brute was at the last extremity, and was bewailing his own fate along with his master's.

"Dogs never howl like that but for a death," said Dick. "Oh, I say, Tom, let's back out of this. I—I—wouldn't go up there if I was you."

"I shall, though," said Tom. "Quarle's not been so bad to me. Still, I don't know but what I'd rather save the dog of the two. And if the old man is gone, what can become of the poor creature left by itself?"

He went up the ladder as he spoke, and on arriving at the window on the first floor, by which they had placed it, found very little difficulty in opening it, having merely to pass his hand through one of the openings where glass should have been, and undo the fastening of the sash. Then he stepped in and looked about him. He was on a wide landing, on to which the doors of several rooms opened, while a broad, handsome staircase, with massive oaken balusters led to an

upper story, and down to the ground floor. Where should he go first to look for old Quarle? He listened, and heard the dog's howling proceeding from one of the rooms below, and they were all in darkness. Tom's heart quailed within him. What might be waiting there besides the dog? If Dick or Harry would only come he should not mind so much, but to go alone, groping his way in the dark, and perhaps stumble on the dead body of the old man. He shrank from the task, and then, going to the window, said, "I'm all right; wont one of you come up?"

"Not—not—unless you want us very much," said Dick, feeling quite ashamed of himself all the time he spoke.

"Wont you, Harry?" said Tom.

"I—I—Dick'll be afraid of stopping down here by himself if I do," said Harry, "and—and—I say, Tom, hadn't you better come down too?"

"No," said Tom, "not till I've seen how things are. I must do as well as I can," he thought. "If I have to go about by myself—perhaps the dog will come if I call him."

He shouted, "Shock—Shock," and presently, to his great relief, poor Shock came, looking thinner than ever, and very forlorn and miserable, but trying hard to wag his tail and put

the best face on matters as he approached Tom, and feebly licked his hands.

"He's no ghost, at any rate," thought Tom, as he patted the poor creature and fed him with a piece of meat which he had brought with him for the purpose. The dog devoured it ravenously, and when he had swallowed it, looked up to Tom as if asking for more.

"Haven't got it, old fellow," said Tom, shaking his head; "but now, where's your master, Shock?
—where's your master? Take me to him, there's a good dog."

Shock appeared to understand what was required of him; for he ran towards the top of the lower flight of stairs, and looked back as if to see if Tom was following him. Being satisfied on this point he went down, and Tom, still keeping near, found himself in what he fancied must be the entrance-hall. Enough light came from the upper windows to show him the direction the dog was taking, and presently Shock ran into a room opening out of the hall, and here Tom followed him.

The window-shutters were closed, but enough light came through two small circular openings in them to guide Tom to them, and he cautiously stepped in their direction. He went very carefully; but in the gloom trod on something that

appeared like a pallet placed on the ground, and on what felt like the limbs of some person stretched on it. Was it a living man or a dead one who lay there? Tom scarcely dared to ask himself the question, but felt for the fastenings of the shutters, and then tried hard to undo them. They were rusty with disuse, and he had some difficulty; besides, his fingers trembled while they did the work-but not with cold. Should he never open them? Oh! how hard and stiff they were! The dog whined at his feet, and once set up again that long, low, miserable howl which now curdled Tom's blood, as he thought of that pallet and its occupant stretched close by him. But at last they were undone, and Tom threw them wide open, and the light—the blessed light of heaven—came pouring in upon the wretched room, from whence it had been shut out for years. Then Tom threw open the window, and drank in the fresh air greedily, while Dick and Harry ran up to him with, "So you've found your way down, old fellow!"

"Come in, do," said Tom. "He's here."

They were less afraid of venturing now. The open window, and the fact that Tom had been able to find his way about the house without let or hindrance from any of its ghostly occupants, gave them courage. But the window was some

distance from the ground, and Tom had to help them through it, and when in, they looked fearfully round, as if anxious, though half afraid, to become acquainted with the secrets of the miser's habitation, till Tom directed their attention to the pallet and its occupant.

It was old Ouarle who lay there, but thinner and paler than they had ever seen him-wasted indeed almost to a skeleton—and with a face of ghastly whiteness. He was perfectly still, and, if alive, quite unconscious of their presence, with his eyes closed, his mouth half-open, and the wretched, worn coverings pulled up close to his chin, as if the last exertion he had made had been to obtain what slender warmth he could from them. The dog saw them looking at his master, and getting on the bed lay down close by him, licking the cold pale face fondly, and fixing his eyes on them as if to ask their help for the wretched creature who for so many years had none but the poor dumb brute to care for him. What little life there yet was flickering in Quarle seemed roused by the dog's caress, for he gave a low, faint sigh, and his eyelids slightly moved.

"He's no ghost," said Dick, confidently; "and so now, Tom, what's to be done for him?"

"Run for the mistress, as she said you were to," replied Tom, "and stop and mind the shop while she comes here. Tell her how he is, and she'll know what to bring—brandy or broth, or whatever she thinks best. I'll stop here and get a fire; I see there's a tinder-box over here, and plenty of wood about; and do you, Harry, go for a doctor. Perhaps you'd better bring whichever you meet with first."

"Not I," said Harry. "Your uncle will be for dosing the little life Quarle's got out of him before the morning, while he may have a chance if Wheatley sees to him. I'll go after him whereever he is, and Mrs. Wilkins will know what to do with the old fellow meanwhile. Come along, Dick; there's no time to lose. Let's get out at the front door, and cut away as fast as we can."

Tom had struck a light while they had been speaking, and having found a rushlight went with Dick and Harry to light them out. They had some trouble in unfastening the front door. It would have been almost better to have gone the way they came, as far as saving time was concerned; but, as Tom said, it would not do for the mistress to be climbing over garden-walls, and getting in at windows, and now he should easily be able to open the door to her. Dick started off as soon as there were the means of egress before him; but Harry paused a moment,

and turning to Tom, said, "You're not afraid of stopping here with him, are you, old fellow?"

"No—poor old soul—he can't do me any harm, and I may do him some good," said Tom; "so run off, Harry, and bring Mr. Wheatley here as quick as you can."

Away Harry went, feeling he would much rather have his own share of the business than Tom's, and the latter closed the door and retraced his way through the long dusty passages to the room where Quarle was lying. Neither the dog nor he had moved since he left them, and he bent anxiously over the old man to see if he still breathed, half afraid that the feeble lamp of life within might have been extinguished in his absence. No, it was still flickering there, though very faintly; and then, thinking that the old man must be very cold. Tom took off his own upper coat and laid it over him. Then he set to work to light a fire in the grate, which was half full of ashes and bits of wood. The last fire had evidently gone out for want of some one to feed it; for there was a good store of wood at the side. and more in a cupboard near. Tom remembered how often he had seen the miser out after a high wind, picking up the boughs that had been blown from the trees at the outskirts of the town. soon had a cheering blaze, and then not knowing

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what else to do while waiting, Tom sat down by the side of the fire, and began to look more carefully than he had done around the room.

It was exceedingly dirty; that was the first impression upon Tom's mind; and it looked in its wretched, sordid comfortlessness just fit for the habitation of a miser; that was the second. There was one 'small round table, which should have had three legs, but the place of the third was supplied by a piece of deal, evidently of Quarle's own fixing, no carpenter would ever have made such a bad job of it; Tom was convinced of that. There was one low stool, now occupied by Tom, a small saucepan, a plate, a chipped mug, and a knife in the cupboard. These, with the pallet on which Quarle lay and the shade for the rushlight, constituted the furniture of the place. But in one corner was a heap of old iron, rusty horseshoes, nails, worn-out saucepans, spoutless kettles; and in another a pile of bones, which partly accounted for the close, foul smell which had beset Tom on first entering the room. Tom knew now why it was the old man was never seen without his wallet, and why it was he so often walked in the middle of the road with his eyes fixed on the ground, or prowled about at the backs of the houses, or poked in the gutter with his knife. He thought he should like to clear the bones

away before his mistress came, but if the old man returned to consciousness he might be angry at having his treasures removed, so perhaps it would be as well not to touch them for the present. And then it occurred to Tom how strange it was that he should always, in some manner or other, find himself Quarle's protector—he whose heart when he first came to Bridgetown had been so full of bitterness against him, that he had felt never in this world could he bring himself to forgive his harshness to his dear father. He was not sure now that he had forgiven him; on the whole he was inclined to think that he had not: but still it was very difficult to feel much anger against the poor helpless creature lying there, on the very borders, as it seemed, of death—a death for which no living creature but a dog would be the worse. "He hasn't done much for himself with all his money," thought Tom; "I think my father was the best off, after all. Poor old sinner!"

And then Tom felt so full of pity for the old man, stretched there in his helpless misery before him, that he began to wonder whether the time would not yet come that he might bring himself to forgive him, satisfied that all his greed and hardness had only punished him far more than any with whom he had dealt however harshly.

Yes, Tom thought, the time would come. "Only

I should like to pay, all the same, every penny my father owed him."

Mrs. Wilkins lost no time in coming to Jacob Quarle. She brought with her, as Tom had thought she would, a little brandy and some good broth, besides a slice of meat for Shock. Dick had especially begged her not to forget him, as he was quite of Tom's opinion, that of the two he was much better worth saving than his master. She gave the old man a spoonful of the brandy while Tom warmed the broth, and then she fed him slowly with that. After a while Quarle's face lost a little of its ghastliness, and he opened his eyes and looked at her, but closed them again almost instantly as if the effort was too much for him; but he was better, decidedly better, Mrs. Wilkins was sure of that, and so was Tom. And then, having fed Shock, and not seeing what more she could do for his master till the doctor came, Mrs. Wilkins began, as Tom had done, to look about her.

"If it isn't breathing dirt!" she whispered, "to be here. Why he might as well have lived in a dusthole at once as turn his home into one. We must get those bones away, Tom; they're enough to breed a fever. Carry them gently, a few at a time, into one of the other rooms, where the smell won't reach us. I'll tell him where they are if

he's well enough to ask, and see if he won't let me sell them. It's not to be thought of, of course, while he's in bed, but shouldn't I like a good scrub at this room?"

Tom began to remove the bones as softly as he could, but for all his care the old man heard him, and opened his eyes, and seemed trying to look in the direction of the noise. Mrs. Wilkins went up to him, "It's only our Tom, Mr. Quarle, Tom Dunstone, you know, tidying up the place a bit. He's a good boy, and honest as the day. Everything's quite safe with him."

The querulous look that had come into the old man's face changed for a more satisfied expression, and Mrs. Wilkins then told Tom that while he was about it, he might as well remove the old iron too; "and to-morrow if all goes well, I'll have a sweep at the room if I can't have a scour. Dear! dear!—what a place, to be sure, for a Christian to live in!"

Tom had his own doubts as to whether a Christian had lived in it, seeing that very few people would have included Quarle under that designation; but as this was not a time to discuss the subject, he went on with his work, and, before he had half finished, Harry returned with Mr. Wheatley.

The doctor quite approved of all that Mrs.

Wilkins had done, and told her she had better go on with the broth and administer the brandy as well at regular intervals. There appeared nothing the matter with the old man but sheer debility, brought on, most probably, by the long continued cold weather and want of sufficient nourishment to support him under it. He promised to send round some strengthening medicine, but then came the question who was to take charge of the old man? He was not fit to be left, as he would require constant nourishment, and Bridgetown did not abound in good nurses; besides, it would need a very trustworthy person for the charge, as one who was otherwise might leave her patient and go searching the house for the bags full of guineas that were reported to be hidden up the chimneys and under the boards. Mrs. Wilkins volunteered to remain there for the night, and perhaps by the next day some arrangement could be made. The doctor promised to look in again, and as soon as he had gone Mrs. Wilkins despatched Tom to her house for an easy-chair for her to sit up in, a pillow for the old man's head (he had a bag of shavings for one now), a warm counterpane for him, a red cover for the table, a tea-pot, tea and several other articles. Wilkins was a first-rate nurse, and, like all good nurses, liked the sick chamber to be as pleasant

and cheery-looking as possible, and it was astonishing, in a little time, what a different appearance she gave to the desolate, sordid room.

Mr. Wilkins came round to see his wife, and to remonstrate with her upon the trouble and fatigue she would incur by nursing old Quarle: but no considerations of that nature would deter Mrs. Wilkins from doing what she thought right. She told her husband Dick was so handy that he would be able to get the tea at home as well as she could do it herself, and that if Tom would come round early in the morning and take her place, she would go home and see to things mean-"Perhaps by that time some one might while. be found who could take charge of the old man; though who there is I'm sure I can't tell, for go where she will Mrs. Higgins always takes her gin-bottle with her; and as to Mrs. Jenkins, she'd search the place high and low to see what she could find, and if she thought there was anything hidden in the old man's mattress, take it from under him to see. However, we won't trouble about that to-night, Seth; time enough for tomorrow when to-morrow comes, but I shall do very well here to-night, if you'll just send Tom round, when you go home, with my knitting. I never feel dull when I've got my needles with me."

Mr. Wilkins knew that his wife would have her own way in the matter, so he went home and sent Tom round with the knitting, and when the doctor came, about nine o'clock, he found her comfortably ensconced in her own easy-chair by the fire, working away at a stocking for Dick, and looking quite as much at home as she ever did in her own bright cheery kitchen. He said Quarle was decidedly better, and Mrs. Wilkins, if so disposed, might safely indulge in a short nap or two in the course of the night; but her patient must on no account be more than a couple of hours without nourishment of some kind. Then he took his leave, telling Mrs. Wilkins, as he shook hands with her, that he wished he had such nurses as she was for all his patients, he should cure them in half the time he did; and went away with Tom.

"What a difference your mistress has made in that place already!" Mr. Wheatley observed, when they were outside.

"Hasn't she!" cried Tom, his honest face brightening up, as it always did when he spoke of his dear mistress. "Somehow she's made the place look almost like home already."

"I think it is home wherever there is such a good woman as Mrs. Wilkins," said the doctor, "and you're a lucky boy, I can tell you,

young fellow, to have her to make a home for you."

The next morning, by six o'clock, Tom was at Quarle's house, and found the old man partaking of a cup of tea, in company with Mrs. Wilkins, who told Tom he might stay and mind him while she went home to "set things to rights a little." Mr. Wilkins was anxious that a nurse should be engaged for the old man, but there was likely to be such a difficulty in meeting with a suitable person, that, as his wife said, it would really be less trouble to see to him themselves. and one way or other, the boys were so good and so handy, she was sure they could manage it between them. Mr. Wilkins was not quite disposed to take this view of the matter; he did not like his wife to be over-exerting herself, and he did not like to spare the boys from the business, and then who was to sit up with the old man at nights? Mrs. Wilkins could not do it always, and he was sure the boys would be afraid to do so. But Mrs. Wilkins said that there would be very little sitting up required—the old man gave so little trouble, and was so much better, that in three or four days he would not require any one to be constantly with him; but used, as he had so long been, to a lonely life, could very well do with occasional attendance; and surely it was not worth while to risk his being robbed and neglected for the sake of the little trouble he would give them for a few days. So Mr. Wilkins gave way, like a sensible man, to his wife, and there was no further talk of looking out for a nurse. Dick took Tom's breakfast to him, and about ten o'clock, by which time Mrs. Wilkins had set matters in order in her own house, and made a meat-pic for dinner, which she charged Dick to see to the baking of, she set off to resume her post at Mr. Quarle's, and send Tom back to the workshop.

She remained at the miser's for the rest of the day, and, sorely against Mr. Wilkins's wish, said she should pass the night there—sitting up never hurt her; besides, it was not sitting up, with a quiet old creature like Mr. Quarle, who was as easy to manage as a baby, and just opened his mouth for whatever you chose to give him, and then fell off to sleep again like a lamb. So she had her own way; but Dick and Tom resolved that the next night she should give up her post to them.

Quarle continued to improve rapidly. The following morning when Tom came to relieve his mistress, he found the old man eating some toast as well as drinking tea, and chatting in a very friendly manner with Mrs. Wilkins. Tom took

her place, and Quarle for a time became silent; but presently observed, "You're queer folks, you and your mistress too."

"Are we?" said Tom. "I'm sure mistress is a good one."

"Yes, that's where her queerness is," replied Quarle. "I think good people are the strangest things in the world. I'd given up believing in them till I knew your mistress—and you."

"Me!—I'm not good," said Tom; "I wish I was! You don't know how bad I feel sometimes—when any one ill-uses Jack, or turns up their nose at me because I'm a 'prentice. You don't know how savage I felt when I thrashed Fred Jefferies the other day, nor how glad I was when it was over to see I'd done it so thoroughly. Now, you know, it really was bad of me to feel like that; but, do you know, sir, if it had to be done again, I'm afraid I should do it."

"I'm afraid so too," replied Quarle; "but I think Fred Jefferies will know better than to give you the chance."

Quarle improved rapidly. Mr. Wheatley candidly avowed that the good living and good nursing he now enjoyed had far more to do with his improvement than medicine, and Tom, who never troubled himself much about such matters when once he had settled them to his satisfaction, was

thinking no more of the thrashing he had given Fred Jefferies, when he found that if he had forgotten it his grand relations had not done so.

About this time Squire Preston came to Bridgetown to see what could be done about him. He had heard from his sister, Mrs. Jefferies, a long account of the cruel usage Fred had received at Tom's hands, and called on her as soon as he came into the town.

Her account of Tom's last piece of delinquency was fully confirmed by Fred. He had been kept from school that day, both his eyes being so swollen, that, as he truthfully declared, it was impossible for him to see out of either of them. Mrs. Jefferies grew quite eloquent as she dwelt on her son's ill-usage to her brother. It was impossible, she said, for such a little graceless wretch as Tom to be allowed to remain any longer in the town. Frederick's life would not be safe if he continued in it, and she implored Mr. Preston to use his utmost efforts to induce Wilkins to transfer his apprentice to some other master. Squire Preston was not too sanguine as to the success of his errand, but he went forth determined to use his efforts to induce Mr. Wilkins to conform to the wishes of Tom's genteel relations.

But Mr. Wilkins was in no hurry to part with

He liked the boy, and would have found it difficult to get a more industrious or obedient apprentice. It is true he would have been better pleased if Tom had not shown himself so fond of fighting, or rather not been so willing to perform what he considered his duty in that respect in spite of his disinclination to it. But apart from this little failing, Tom was so good a lad, that independent of the assistance he was in the business, Mr. Wilkins would have been sorry to part with him. Indeed, Mr. Wilkins had no occasion to look too closely at that considera-He was really very well to do, and had quite enough for his wife and himself even if he gave up the business, which at times lately he had thought of doing, especially since that last attack of lumbago for which Dr. Jefferies had taken him in hand so thoroughly. But then it had occurred to him, what was he to do with his two apprentices? And, even if he were to yield to Mr. Preston's wishes and transfer Tom's indentures, he should still have Dick to look after till he was one-and-twenty.

But he was a well-meaning man and a just one, and he thought that it might possibly be a bad thing for Tom to grow up in the near neighbourhood of persons who were constantly calling forth so much ill-feeling on the boy's part. And

it would have been an easy matter for Mr. Wilkins to find another master for Tom, for his wife's brother, who was a house carpenter in London, would have been ready enough to take such a lad as Tom off his hands without even requiring any portion of the small premium which the parish had paid with him; for Tom knew something of his trade now, and would have been an acquisition to any master carpenter.

But Seth Wilkins was not going to tell Mr. Preston all this. He heard all that the Squire had to say, and contented himself with replying that he would think matters over and see what the lad himself had to say to it. Mr. Preston thought it was quite unnecessary for him to consult Tom, who, according to him, ought to have no voice at all in the matter, but simply be turned over from one master to another like a horse or a sheep. But finding Mr. Wilkins resolved that, in a matter which so closely affected his apprentice, he himself should be consulted, he suggested that it would be as well for Tom to see his relations—he was bound to be guided by their wishes in the matter—and hear what they thought about Could Mr. Wilkins spare Tom to come that afternoon to Dr. Jefferies, and there he could meet the doctor and the lawyer, their ladies and himself, all together.

Mr. Wilkins shook his head. "It's all very well for me to tell Tom to go to the doctor's, but I doubt—yes, I very much doubt whether he'd do it. He told Mrs. Wilkins that after the way Mrs. Jefferies treated little Jack he would never enter their house again, and never have anything to do with one of them; and except in the way of thrashing Master Jefferies once or twice, which of course isn't to be regarded as keeping on friendly terms with his relations, Tom's kept his word. And if he did come, sir, and was to fall in with his cousin, why something awkward might happen, which would be very unpleasant to all parties—especially Master Jefferies."

And having made this long speech, Mr. Wilkins wiped his face nervously and looked at Mr. Preston, as if anxious to hear what he had to say in reply. That gentleman considered a little, and then said, "Well, do you think he would come over to my house? There are no boys for him to fight there, and he can meet Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown at the same time. They are coming over to spend the day with my wife this day week. Could you spare the young fellow then?"

Yes, Mr. Wilkins thought he could. Tom was going over to a farm near the Squire's, and to

take little Jack back to Ambrose Dunstone's. He should call on Mr. Preston then, and Mr. Wilkins would lay the case before him in the interim, so that he would have time to think matters over by himself.





CHAPTER XIV.

TOM VISITS HIS MOTHER'S OLD HOME.

R. WILKINS talked seriously to Tom upon the cause of Mr. Preston's visit to him. He laid the case fairly and fully before him in all its bearings, and even promised that, if Tom himself thought it best to go further away from his relations, he would do his utmost to help him by writing at once to his brother-inlaw, and offering to transfer Tom's indentures to him. Tom's eyes sparkled at the thought of going to London; sixty years ago, when railroads were unknown, it was a rare chance for a country lad to have such an opportunity offered him. But he shrank from the thought of leaving little Jack; and Peculiar, who was listening to Mr. Wilkins with wide open eyes and mouth, clung to his brother as if he would have kept him from ever leaving him, but all the while saying nothing, having a dim faith, poor child! "that Tom would know best."

"I wish I'd the chance," said Dick, when they were alone. "But it wont do for me to leave my old grandfather—at least, he wont let me do it. But wouldn't it be jolly, Tom, for you and me to go together to seek our fortunes. I wonder which would be Lord Mayor first."

Tom's ambition would have been satisfied by something far below that dignity. To pay off his father's creditors—especially Quarle—and have a home for little Jack, was all he aimed at. But he would have felt much more inclined to go to London if Dick could have accompanied him, for he had an idea, in common with most country boys, that fortunes were much more easily made there than anywhere else; and, hard as it would be to part with little Jack, still if his doing so would lead to their having a home together sooner, why it would be the best thing to do. But to go quite alone into that strange great world was too much even for Tom's brave heart—it was a very loving one withal, and it was too serious an undertaking for him to contemplate quite calmly. Still, he said that he would go and see the Squire, and hear what Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown had to say. After all, they were his mother's kin, and it would be only right to hear what they had to propose to him. And so, accordingly, a week after Squire Preston's visit to Mr. Wilkins, Tom started off with little Jack from Bridgetown, and having left some hurdles at a neighbouring farm, found himself driving up to the house which had been his mother's home.

It was not at all a grand place, though Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown were fond of talking of it as "the Hall," but it had a pleasant, old-fashioned, homelike look that won upon the beholder; and the myrtle grew tall and thick up to the first-floor windows, as it will do in the West country. Tom remembered to have heard his mother talk of this myrtle, and how she would put her hand out of the bedroom window—the little one over the porch—to gather its blossoms for a nosegay for her toilet table. He looked up at the window wistfully, as if trying to catch a glimpse of that dear face that would never smile on him more, and then pointed it out to Jack as "Mother's room, when she was a girl."

A serving-man came up and took the horse to the stable, and in answer to Tom's inquiry whether the Squire was at home, said that he was out in one of the fields looking after the men, but had left word if Tom came he might wait till he came in. Were Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown in? No; they were expected to dinner, but that was not till two o'clock, and it was now only one. So

Tom had better come in the kitchen and eat some bread and cheese.

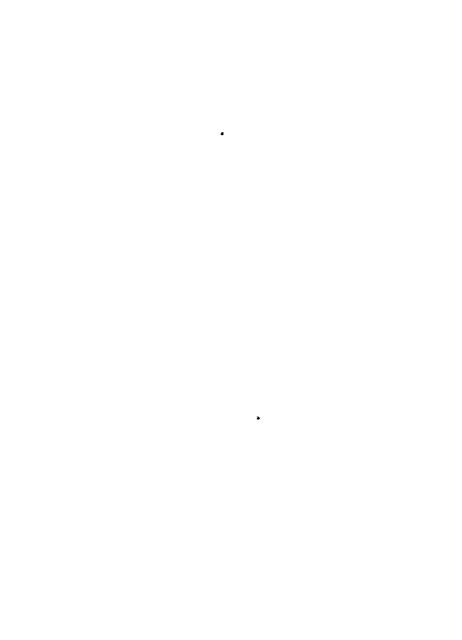
Tom was not a proud boy, and very ready, though his father had kept both men and maids, to help Mrs. Wilkins in any little household office that a boy could do, and was not at all ashamed of being a carpenter's apprentice, who had to work for his living, with nothing but his own right hand to depend on for his bread; but to sit down with his uncle's servants in *that* house was what he felt his mother's son had no right to do.

"Thank you," he said, bluntly; "I think when my mother lived here, her place was the parlour, and if Jack and I ain't fit company for that, I'm sure we're not for the kitchen. So bring round my horse, my man, and there's sixpence for your pains."

The sixpence was Tom's last—it might be long enough before he would have another; but he was not going to give his uncle's servant any trouble without paying him; and the man stared at money being offered him by a "'prentice boy" for bringing up his cart. But as Tom stood there, with his head thrown back and his face flushed, he looked very little like a "'prentice boy," but much more like the son of the outspoken yeoman, his father, and of pretty graceful.

Lucy Preston, the truest lady that ever bore that name.

Tom did not know that any one but the serving-man had heard him, but a lady carefully and expensively dressed in rich brown silk and with choice lace on her mob cap, came out of the house, and laid her hand on his shoulder. He recognised her for Mrs. Preston. She might have been pretty once, but her looks were sadly faded now, and she had a worn, anxious expression and a timid, nervous manner which gave any one the impression that she was constantly labouring under a secret dread of some one. And in truth this was the case: Mrs. Preston was always in fear of her husband. She had brought him money, but he took care she should have little to do with the spending of it. He liked her to dress well because she was his wife, and she sat at the head of his table, and was called the mistress of his house, but he ruled in everything, and the poor lady felt as if she could never meet his requirements, let her try as she would. He was a hard, harsh man who liked every one around him to have no will but his, and generally Mrs. Preston obeyed him implicitly, but she had ventured to differ from him in one point, and that was his treatment of his orphan nephews. She had no children of her own, poor lady, and she would so have





"'You'll come in, my dear, with me,' she said."-P. 201.

liked to have adopted those two boys. She had ventured to say as much to her husband, but he had been angry with her for even thinking of such a thing, and since then she had not dared to show any interest in Tom or Jack, though her heart had warmed to the motherless children whenever she saw them. But she had overheard Tom's answer to the old serving-man, and she could not refrain from going out and trying to soothe the hurt feelings that she felt must have prompted the answer.

"You'll come in, my dear, with me," she said; "John has made a little mistake. Bring the cold pigeon pie and some cheesecakes in the parlour for my nephews, John. They will want something after their ride."

She took them into the room where she had been sitting, and John soon brought the tray, but Tom did not care to eat in that house, the master of which had said that he and Jack might be kept by the parish for anything he would do to prevent it. Jack ate a cheesecake, and Tom looked round at the pictures. They were not a grand collection, nor very finely painted. The Prestons were not a rich family, nor of any great standing in the county, so their family portraits were not likely to be of any great general interest, but Tom looked earnestly at them. Mrs.

Preston saw him doing so, and told him who they were,—his grandfather, with powdered hair and skyblue coat; his grandmother, also powdered and with a long waist and an enormous hoop; the Squire and herself, in their wedding clothes; and, what Tom liked a great deal better, a little sketch of his mother as a girl. Then she showed him the old china; great punchbowls full of dried rose-leaves, claret beakers, with the family coat-of-arms burned on them, curious old mugs with dragon handles, which some greatuncle had brought from China, and plates of all sizes and patterns. After this she took him upstairs into the different bedrooms, and there Tom saw the famous patchwork he had heard his mother tell of, quilts and testers and bed-curtains and valance, all formed of little bits of printed cotton, sewn together in different patterns. Those were the days for four-post bedsteads, and I can assure you the patchwork hangings with which Tom's great-aunts had hung them, did credit to their industry. Then Mrs. Preston took Tom into the little room that had been his mother's, telling him she believed it was nearly the same as when she occupied it; and the boy stood hushed and reverent, looking on it. Then he drew a long breath, and turning to Mrs. Preston, said simply, "Thank you, aunt," and followed her downstairs, for the sound of wheels was heard; and, leaving him in the parlour, Mrs. Preston went out to welcome her sisters-in-law.

Jack and Tom sat quite quietly for some time, looking again at the old-fashioned furniture and the pictures on the walls, and thinking—at least the former—how strange it seemed their mother should ever have lived in the house where they were now such strangers. After a time John, the old serving-man, told them the Squire was ready to see them if they would come that way. They followed him into a little room called the study, where the Squire kept a few books which had been in the family for many years. The only addition he had ever made to their number was "Burn's Justice," which, since he had had some hopes of holding a commission of the peace, he had purchased secondhand, and on winter evenings did his best to understand it, in which he succeeded as well as most country gentlemen generally do. The Squire was sitting here now, the centre of the family group, with Mrs. Jefferies on his right hand, Mrs. Brown on his left, and their respective husbands by the side of each lady. Mrs. Preston was at the window, knitting. She looked anxiously at the boys as they entered. Poor soul! how gladly she would have kept them in her home and acted the mother to them;

and how hard it seemed that they had never, since their mother's death, been allowed to enter the house till now, when the very reason of their being there seemed the hardest thing of all.

Mr. Preston did not tell Tom to sit down. He was there to be treated rather like a black sheep, something quite unworthy of the honour of being considered part of the family, and he addressed him in a tone which Mrs. Jefferies thought delightfully impressive, and calculated to strike awe into the mind of the delinquent before them. In fact, Mr. Preston was rehearsing the part he meant to perform when, as a justice of the peace, a refractory vagrant or an incorrigible poacher should be brought before him. Besides, he wished to impress Tom's mind with a sense of his wickedness, and make him humble and penitent accordingly, and glad to atone for his past misconduct by going anywhere the family wished, in order that he might no longer annoy them by his close propinquity. Tom listened very quietly as his uncle went over the list of his transgressionshis thrashing his cousin Fred, his teaching his little brother to be insolent to his relatives. These were all the direct charges which the Squire could think of, but he made a great many vague ones, and these all pointed to the same thing, that as Tom had so misbehaved himself it would be much better if he would ask his master to transfer his indentures to some one in his own trade at a suitable distance from the town—say Exeter or Somerset—and not remain in Bridgetown, where he was a constant annoyance, and, from his past conduct must always, where it was known, be a disgrace, to his family.

"Unless it is that I've got to get my own living, I don't see the disgrace," said Tom; "and if Fred will keep out of my way and let Jack alone, I'll keep out of his."

"You hardened, wicked boy," cried Mrs. Jefferies; "when you are always finding an excuse to quarrel with the poor boy, and have already nearly killed him."

"And you are ruining that unfortunate child by the way you're bringing him up," cried Mrs. Brown. "Mrs. Dunstone ought to know better than to let him be so much with you."

"And if you don't turn from your evil ways there's no knowing to what they may bring you," said Mr. Brown, solemnly.

"And your bad companions," added Mrs. Jefferies. "I am sorry to say it, Tom, but it's well known that you keep company with the idlest and worst boys in the town."

"That he don't," put in Jack, who had been listening with open eyes and ears to the storm of

words poured on his brother, and turning wonderingly first to one speaker and then to the other—"that he don't; for nobody can say he keeps company with Gus or Fred."

"And altogether, Tom," said Dr. Jefferies, "it seems to me the best and wisest thing you can do is to leave the town. We don't wish to be hard upon you"—to do him justice, Dr. Jefferies believed that he did not—"and if Mr. Wilkins can find a safe and respectable master for you at a suitable distance, we'll pay your fare by coach there, and make you a little present besides."

"If my master says that I've served him so badly that he wishes to part with me I'll go," said Tom, doggedly; "but I'll not leave the town because the fine folks that weren't too proud once to call themselves my uncles and aunts think I'm a disgrace to them now. And as to Fred, let him take care of himself. I'll not meddle with him if he don't with me—or with Jack—and if he does, why, let him look out, that's all."

"Actually threatening Frederick before my very face!" cried Mrs. Jefferies, lifting up her hands and eyes; while Tom, turning to Jack, said, "Let's go away, Peculiar, we've been here a little too long as it is." He was about to lead Jack out of the room, when that small person caught

sight of Mrs. Preston's face. She was looking tearfully and anxiously at them. Jack ran across the room, jumped into her lap, and kissed her repeatedly. Tom walked up to her. "I was forgetting my manners, aunt; Jack's made me remember them," and putting forth his hand, which the poor lady took in her own trembling one, he shook it heartily, and bidding her goodbye, walked out of the room, without troubling himself about any one else in it.





CHAPTER XV.

A NEW START IN LIFE—HOW TOM FOLLOWED THE PARSON'S ADVICE.

HE winter gave way to the spring, and things went on at Bridgetown in much the usual way. Old Quarle had recovered, and was able to walk about and do his marketings for himself. Mrs. General Mauriel was very kind to Tom whenever she met him, asking after little Jack, and telling Tom he must be sure and come to see her whenever he came to Bridgetown; and she had a special pleasure whenever she met the doctor or Mrs. Brown in asking them how that fine little fellow, their youngest nephew, was. But an important event occurred to Dickthe cold March winds had carried off his grandfather, and he was now left quite alone in the world, "with nobody to look after me in one place more than another," he said to Tom, "and nobody to care for me either, but you, old fellow.

Oh! Tom, if you'd only be good-natured enough to oblige your fine relations, and go off to London, I'd ask the master to let me go too, and we'd soon see if we couldn't do something better for ourselves than we shall ever be able to do here."

Some thoughts of the same kind had occurred to Mr. Wilkins. They might never have crossed his mind had it not been for Mr. Preston's visit. but he had since then often found himself speculating upon the feasibility of giving up business and taking a cottage a little way out of the town, where he might spend his time in cultivating a garden, and amuse himself with keeping pigs and His health had been getting much poultry. worse lately. Dr. Jefferies had certainly cured the lumbago, but he had so prostrated his patient by his treatment of the complaint, that, as Mrs. Wilkins often said. Seth would have been far better had he let him alone altogether. Sometimes Tom thought his master would be very well pleased if he were to ask him to transfer his indentures, and at last he talked the matter over with Dick, and they came to the conclusion that they would broach the question to Mr. Wilkins, and if he felt that he would rather give up business than continue it on their account, leave it to him to transfer their services to another master.

Mr. Wilkins was not ill-pleased when the boys did so, though he heard what they had to say with his usual mournful gravity. He said he would take time to consider, and consult the mistress and the minister. For himself, he should not be sorry to give up the business; it did not —it was no use hiding the truth—it did not pay, and he should never be able to work again as he had done at it, which of course would make the loss all the greater; still it was not right to think only of himself, he must consider what was best to be done for the boys; he had taken them as his apprentices and he must do his duty by them. And the boys knew that there for the present the matter must rest, and, whatever Seth Wilkins thought was his duty by them, that was what he would try to do.

He talked the matter over with his wife and Mr. Dennes. Mrs. Wilkins was fond of both the boys, still she could not help thinking they might do better for themselves in London than in such a quiet little place as Bridgetown; and she knew that her husband was no longer able to work as he had done, but wanted rest and quiet; and the minister was much of her way of thinking; besides, the old man felt that it was a bad thing for Tom to be living so near his relations, and to have his feelings so frequently embittered by their insolence and contempt. He would be far better away from them all, there could only be ill feelings constantly excited whenever they came in contact. The next thing was for Mr. Wilkins to write to his brother-in-law, asking him if he would take both the boys as apprentices to finish their time with him.

The answer, anxiously expected by both Tom and Dick, came back in due course. Mr. Groom could find room for them both, as they seemed likely, handy lads; and as he was very busy just now, the sooner they came the better. Then Mrs. Wilkins began to bestir herself to prepare all things for their journey. She washed and mended their linen, saw that they had new boots and warm comforters and coats for the journey. while Mr. Wilkins applied to Mr. Brown to arrange the legal matters connected with the change of masters. That gentleman was very ready to do his part towards sending Tom away, but when he was reminded of Dr. Jefferies' promise that if Tom left the town his relations. would pay his coach fare to his next destination, he refused to give any assistance himself or to ask the other members of the family to do so. Tom had not gone when they asked him, but had stayed till it suited his own convenience to leave the town, and had behaved with very great insolence to the whole of his relations when they expressed a wish that for their own credit's sake he should leave the place where he had so disgraced them.

Tom was not sorry when he heard of this. He had no wish to be under any obligation to people who were ashamed of him. "Never mind, master," he said, stoutly, "Dick and I will trudge it. We can easily do our twenty miles a day, and shall get to London in less than a week at that rate."

But Mr. Wilkins would not hear of their going to London in such a manner, though both Dick and Tom would have liked it very much better than even going by the coach, but as a waggon was to leave Bridgetown in three days' time, it was arranged that they should go by that. The waggoner was a steady, good-humoured fellow, and would look after the boys at nighttime, and they would be as safe under his charge as if they went by coach; and as to their being longer on the road, why that would only give them more time to see the country through which they travelled.

Tom went over to see Jack before he left. It was a hard parting for the boys; Peculiar clung to his brother and kissed him again and again when it came to the last, and seemed as if he

could not bring himself to part with him. At last Tom had to undo his hands gently from his neck and place him on the ground. "Don't fret, Jack, it's all for the best. I'll work so hard to get a home for us both, and then you shall live with me, and we'll never be parted any more."

Then Tom tore himself away and ran off as fast as he could, for fear he should hear Jack crying after him; but he need not have been afraid, Jack had made up his mind that it was for the best, since Tom said so, and that he would keep down his tears if possible. But he sulked instead for two days, scarcely vouchsafing to speak to Mrs. Ambrose or her husband, and at the end of that time went about much as usual, only that he was quieter and graver, and, as Mrs. Ambrose said, "more like an old folks' bairn than ever"

But when Tom was out of sight of the farm-house, he sat down and had a thorough good cry by himself. Poor little Jack! how could he ever have brought himself to part with him? It was too late now, or I think Tom would have been glad to have given up the idea of going to London, after all, sooner than bear the heart-wrench parting with Jack inflicted on him. But he felt better and more hopeful after a time, and rose

up, determined to do his very best to keep his word to Jack, and make a home for him before long.

As he entered the town he met old Quarle, who stepped up to him and said, wistfully, "So I hear you're going to leave us?"

"Yes; I want to see what I can do for myself in London," said Tom, cheerily. "They say that's the best place to make money in."

"And to lose it, too," said Quarle.

"Well, I've got none to lose," replied Tom; "but I want to make all I can. There's Jack to be thought of—and you, Mr. Quarle."

"You can think of me—in the way you mean
—when I ask you," replied the old man, sullenly;
"but if you'd drop me a linenow and then, just
to let me know how you are getting on, I should
be glad: and you needn't mind about the postage,
I'd pay that. But you're a foolish boy to go;
the town wont seem the same without you; and
you might have done better for yourself if you
had stopped here."

He turned away, and Tom went on, thinking how strange it was that he should feel sorry at parting with old Quarle. He met the parson next, and he stopped him with "So, my boy, you're going to leave us. Well, London's a large place; there's room for a fellow to strike out

there. I hope we shall hear of your doing well."

"I hope so, sir," said Tom.

"You're the right sort to get on," said Mr. Trevor; "I think you'll know how to take care of yourself. Go on as you've begun. Work hard, speak the truth, never quarrel if you can help it, but if you can't, why stand up for your rights like a man, and show folks a west-country boy can hit out from the shoulder with any of them. And there's something to keep your pocket warm, my lad, and so good-bye," and the parson shook hands heartily with Tom and stood looking after him as he walked up the street, saying to himself, "It would have been almost worth while to have got married to have had such a fellow as that for a son. If he only does as well as he deserves he'll come back the richest of the family. They wont think him so much of a disgrace to them then."

Tom had not gone far before he met Mrs. General. Every one seemed out this fine evening as if to bid him good-bye. He touched his cap respectfully, and was about to pass her without speaking, when she stopped him—

"I'm so sorry, Tom, you're going away. There'll be no one to keep those nice boys your cousins in order if you leave the town. But I shall

have little Jack to come and stop with me at times, and I'll take good care neither Frederick nor Gussy annoys him. There, I dare say you'll find some use for that; you'll be a strange boy if you don't."

She slipped a five-shilling piece into his hand as she spoke, and tapping his cheek, said kindly, "Good-bye; keep a stout heart, and I'll look after little Jack, and see how soon I can teach him to send you a long letter telling you the news."

She turned away, and the same thought crossed her mind that had the parson's, for she said to herself, "Well, I never liked babies, but I do think I wouldn't have minded being plagued with one to have seen him grow up into a boy like that. Ah, dear! how proud I should have been of him!—and what a soldier he would have made, to be sure."

Mr. Dennes came that evening to Mr.Wilkins's. He stayed to supper, and afterwards offered up prayers, pouring forth a special petition for the two youths about to leave their native place and try their fortunes amongst strangers. It was a very simple prayer, but came home to the heart of those who heard it, and when it was over the old man gave each of the boys his little present—a small pocket Testament. They were strongly

but cheaply bound—little homely-looking books, but Tom and Dick possess them yet, and, well thumbed and worn as they are, would not part with them for the most gorgeous volume that was ever issued from a bookseller's shop. Then Tom and Dick went upstairs and spent their last night together in the little attic, and the next morning they rose early, for the waggon started at seven, and came down to breakfast, which Mrs. Wilkins had all ready for them.

She kissed them at parting as if they had been her very own boys, and Seth shook hands with them, saying, "You've been good lads, and I hope you'll do as well with your new master as you have with me. It seems hard to part with you, for I never had better 'prentices; but I hope I've done all for the best, and that time will prove it."

"Thank you, sir," cried Dick, heartily, "and I hope our new master will be as good a one as the old. We'll do our duty by him, wont we, Tom, if he is?"

"Yes, and even if he isn't," said Tom; "but he must be one of the right sort, being the mistress's brother. Good-bye, master; good-bye, mistress; you'll remember little Jack."

"That I will, Tom," replied Mrs. Wilkins; "he shall often come and spend a week with us.

Good-bye, God bless you;—g—good-bye." Mrs. Wilkins was fairly overcome, and turning back into her kitchen sat down by the table and sobbed outright. Her husband came to comfort her, and the boys went on by themselves to the inn-yard from which the waggon was about to start.

The four horses looked fresh and vigorous for their journey; the waggoner was in good spirits, and very well pleased with his companions for the road. A number of boys, old friends of Dick and Tom, were waiting there to see them off. There was such a shaking of hands and utterance of good wishes. "Come and see us again before long, Tom. You'll ride in your coach, now, before any of us." "Oh, yes; that will be the lord mayor's." "Good-bye, Dick; mind you let us all know how you are getting on." And then up came Harry Swain with two knives, which he had been saving up his pocket-money to buy since he had first heard of the likelihood of his friends going, and had got his mother to help him as his own funds were not quite sufficient. They were exactly alike, strong buckhorn handles and two blades to each. He gave one to Tom and the other to Dick, and said, as he shook hands with the former, "Don't you fear for little Jack; if he comes to Bridgetown I'll take care of him."

Then Tom and Dick got on the seat, one on each side of the driver, and as the waggon drove off the boys set up a loud hurra! and took off their hats and waved them in the air, and Tom and Dick took off theirs too, and shouted hurra in return, and tried to look as if they were not at all sorry that they were going to leave Bridgetown, but looked upon it as a very jovial thing indeed to do, and one that there was no occasion at all for any uneasiness about.

The boys ran after them to the outskirts of the town; some of them—Harry was one—a little further; but when the last of them had gone, Dick gave a very heavy sigh, and looking rather dolefully at Tom, said, "We've seen the last of Bridgetown folks for one while, I reckon."

Not quite the last however, for when the waggon had gone a few yards further they espied Master Fred leaning his back against a stile, and talking to Gussy, who was surveying the waggon with rather a supercilious air. Mrs. Brown had taken it into her head that her dear child Gussy required strengthening, and there was nothing, she knew very well, like new milk drunk fasting for that purpose, and therefore she wished Gussy to

go every morning to a farm a little way out of the town, in order to get some; and Fred, who liked new milk very well too, generally accompanied his cousin on these excursions. "I'll take no notice of them," thought Tom; "it's not worth while to get into a row just as one's leaving the town. Besides, as parson told me, it's as well not to quarrel if one can help it."

But Fred was not so peaceably disposed as Tom, or rather he thought this a favourable opportunity for indulging in a little impertinence, so he raised his voice, and, looking significantly at Tom, said, in a tone evidently meant for him to hear, "There goes a good riddance of bad rubbish."

"Did you mean me?" asked Tom, looking down from the height of the waggon seat.

"What's that to you if I did?" replied Fred.

"Every one knows that you're only leaving the town because folks wont let you stay in it any longer. Have you got any message to that little beggar brother of yours when I see him?"

Down Tom sprang, though the waggoner began to remonstrate with, "Oi can't stop vor voighting; ye'll have to catch the waggon up as ye can, or be left behoind if ye don't. Oi'm behoind time as it is."

"I shan't be long settling him," replied Tom,

and ran up to Fred, who, seeing Tom was in earnest, began to think of running away, but was stopped, before he had retreated half-a-dozen yards, by a well-aimed blow, which showed that if Tom remembered the parson's advice about not quarrelling if he could help it, he had not forgotten what he told him about hitting out in good west-country style. Down Fred went, and rolled over and over till he found a soft but not agreeable bed in a ditch, where a close growth of nettles concealed a stratum of thick, black, juicy mud. Fred's face and hands were stung in fifty places, and his clothes covered with mud, while Tom stood triumphantly over him.

"Tell the beggar-boy when you see him how I've served you; and that, if you ill-use him in any way, I'll pay you off ten times worse, if I have to walk all the way from London to do it."

Then Tom took his place by the side of the waggoner as coolly as if nothing had happened; and this was the last he saw for many a long day of any of his fine relations.





CHAPTER XVI.

A JOURNEY BY WAGGON TO LONDON—AN ADVENTURE
ON HOUNSLOW HEATH—STEELE'S MAY.

NN the whole, I am inclined to think that it was a very good thing Tom's relations refused to pay his coach fare up to town for him. It was every way better travelling in the waggon; it gave the boys plenty of opportunities for seeing the different counties through which they passed. of walking by hedgerows fresh with the sweet May greenness, of resting at midday at some pleasant roadside inn, of chatting to the country people, of seeing curious old churches and pleasant homesteads. Then there were the towns, and excepting Bridgetown, which was but a small place, the boys had never been in one. So when they passed through Bristol, almost as smoky and dirty sixty years ago as it is now, they were lost in amaze at its size, and the number of its houses, and the contents of its shops.

"Is London bigger and busier than this?" asked Dick of the waggoner, who was a man of great experience, and thought no more of a visit to London, as Dick said, than *he* would of going to Boreham.

"Yo'll see," replied the man, laughing, "and Oi waunt say but in parts it's a'most as dirty."

Then they came to Bath, which made Tom feel as if it was a city out of Fairyland, especially as the evening was closing in, and the glimmering lights in the streets shone on its strange white loveliness. "Is London more beautiful than this?" he asked of the waggoner. "No—it can't be."

"Oi daun't think it can," replied the man. "To my thinking, country folk will never fall in love with London for its looks."

They passed through Reading, and then through Windsor, when Tom, who was very loyal, as all the Dunstones had ever been, looked at the Castle, massive and towering over the little town crouching humbly at its feet, and thought sadly of the poor old sovereign shut within its walls with darkened eyes and mind. "As happy as a king!" he said, half aloud,—"well, it don't hold true in his case."

"Not quite," said Dick. "I wonder what he'd give, Tom, if he could change with us?"

They left Windsor behind, and proceeded towards Hounslow. Dobbs the waggoner had intended to put up there for the night, and start by daybreak in the morning, so as to be in London in good time. Hounslow Heath sixty years ago did not bear the best of characters. It was a favourite resort of highwaymen, and few respectable people cared to be out late on it. A railroad now runs near the heath, which is pretty well covered with trim villas and pretty cottages. But at the time of which I speak the heath stretched for miles without a house upon it—a large wide expanse, only broken with furze bushes and brambles, with here and there a tree. One tree in particular there was of which terrible stories were told-"Steele's May." It was a large old hawthorn, that grew in the loneliest part of the Staines road, and, underneath this tree, it was said that some years previously a man of the name of Steele had been cruelly murdered, and that his ghost still haunted it. Dobbs the waggoner repeated this legend to the boys with sundry embellishments of his own, and it was very clear that, whether true or not, he firmly believed in it. Of the murder there was indeed no question; that was a well authenticated fact; but of the ghost I would not be quite so sure. As to the tree, I have seen it myself, and believe

it is still in existence; but if so, it must be surrounded with houses, and the Staines Road is now a lively thoroughfare, with horses and carriages continually going to and fro in its centre, and nursemaids with perambulators on its sidepaths, and at any time in the twenty-four hours I suppose it would be as safe as any other part of the kingdom, instead of being the lonely, dreary track through the bare, black heath it was sixty years ago, desolate and eerie looking at all hours to those who knew its evil fame, and a place to be shunned and dreaded by all honest men as night drew near.

Tom and Dick listened, as boys were sure to do, with great interest to all Dobbs's stories of Hounslow Heath, and of Steele's May in particular. The waggoner, as he spoke, urged his horses on faster, for he had no wish to be late in passing through the heath, not caring to meet with either the ghost or the robbers who were supposed to frequent it. They had not gone above four miles from Windsor when Dobbs saw that the girth of one of his horses was unloosed. He got down rather quickly to fasten it, and, his foot slipping, fell heavily on the ground, and had he been but two inches nearer the waggon the wheels must have passed over him. The boys jumped down and helped him up, but when he

tried to stand he found the pain of his foot so great that, great strong man though he was, it nearly caused him to faint. He sat down on the ground for awhile, and when a little recovered tried once more to ascend the waggon in order to drive, but found it impossible to do so, as the pain he felt the moment he put his foot to the ground was more than he could bear. A labouring man passing by inquired what was amiss, and on being told, pronounced the accident to be most likely a sprain, which would disable Dobbs for several days, and offered to assist the boys in placing him inside the waggon, as his driving it was quite out of the question.

Dobbs reluctantly assented to this, and with some difficulty he was placed in a tolerably comfortable position amongst the sacks and barrels in the waggon. Then the question arose what was next to be done. Dick offered to take the reins, and felt confident in his own ability to drive if need were to London. But Dobbs would not hear of this. In the first place, he felt jealous that a boy like Dick should drive the four horses that he flattered himself no one could manage as well as he did; and in the next, the pain in his foot was so great that he was anxious to have it attended to as soon as possible. He therefore told Dick that he would trust him to

drive, but that it could only be as far as the Three Magpies, a small inn on the outskirts of Windsor, the people of which he knew very well, and that he would put up his horses there for the night, and by the next morning might possibly be able to drive them himself. Dick turned the horses' heads round, and they retraced the two miles they had travelled past the Three Magpies; but on arriving there Dobbs's ankle was pronounced by the village doctor, who was quickly summoned to it, to be so badly sprained that it would be at least a week before he would be able to set his foot to the ground.

This was worse news than even the countryman who had helped Dobbs into the waggon had led them to expect. Tom and Dick felt that it would not do for them to stop with Dobbs till he was able to drive them into London. They were expected there, and they could not afford to stop at the inn; they felt sorry to leave the waggoner, but he was evidently in good hands, and would be well taken care of. The distance from Windsor to London was not more than they could easily walk that afternoon and the next day, if Dobbs felt disinclined to trust them with the waggon.

And this they found Dobbs was. He quite laughed at the idea of two such boys driving

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his horses through "Lunnun streets and into the Tabard."

So Dick and Tom thought it best to start at once, as the afternoon was drawing on, and they had twelve good miles to walk before they reached the Bell inn at Hounslow, where they thought of putting up for the night, and starting early the next morning for London. They left their bundles in Dobbs's charge, only taking with them their remaining provisions, which would just suffice for their supper, and two or three articles they would require for the night, and then, bidding the waggoner good-bye, away they started.

"We must walk fast, Tom," said Dick, "or we shan't get clear of that heath before dark. Well, we haven't got much to be robbed of, that's one thing, if we do fall in with any footpads; but the ghost would be an awkward customer. I shouldn't much like to come across him."

They trudged on manfully, not sitting down to rest till they reached Hounslow Heath, by which time they began to feel very tired.

"It's not dark yet, though it soon will be," said Dick; "suppose we rest a bit and get our supper. It will be better to eat it here than at the Bell, where they might think we ought to buy what we want of them. Here's a nice

place just by this stile. It's quite dry, and if we do see any queer customers coming we can pop across the stile and hide behind the hedge; and it's too soon yet for there to be any chance of our meeting the ghost."

"If it wasn't, I think we're just in the right spot for it," said Tom; "for this looks to me very like the tree Dobbs was telling us of; see, it's may—the buds are opening—he said it was near a stile, and not a house or scarcely another tree in sight. It's Steele's May, you may be sure of it, Dick. Do you think you shall fancy eating your supper under it?"

"Well, I'm terribly tired and hungry," said Dick, "and I don't like going further just because there's a chance of seeing a ghost that's no business at all to show itself till after dark. Besides, we ain't *sure* that this is the tree, after all, so pull out the pasties, Tom, and let's have some supper."

The pasties were soon disposed of, but both Dick and Tom felt unwilling to rise and seek their quarters at the Bell. They were thoroughly tired, and the evening was so sweet and still, only broken by the "jug-jug" of the nightingale, and the stars one after another came out shining so peacefully down on the weary boys, that it seemed hard to exchange all this soft, gentle

beauty for the noise and the smells of a close village inn.

"It'll be long enough before we see the country again," said Tom, throwing himself on his back, and placing his arm under his head, so that he might look the better at the starlit sky above him.

"Long enough indeed," said Dick, following Tom's example; "we may as well stop a little longer in it while we can. I don't believe ghosts ever stir out till midnight, and as to footpads, they wont think of carrying on their trade such a fine night as this; so we wont hurry away, but stop here and take our chance—eh, Tom?"

"I don't mind," said Tom. "I'm not much afraid of either the ghost or the thieves; and I expect it's a deal nicer here than at the Bell.

The two boys remained silent after this, and gradually, although nothing was further from either of their intentions when they lay down, fell off asleep. All was so still around, and they were so tired, having not only walked from Windsor in the afternoon, but walked for some miles by the side of the waggon in the early part of the day, that they slept for some hours, and might have done so for a much longer period had not the sound of voices roused Tom, who was always a much lighter sleeper than Dick.





"Two men were bending over the prostrate figure of a third."-P. 231.

He rubbed his eyes, and, leaning on his elbow, listened and glanced around him. To describe what now took place; and which I wish you, boys, to bear in mind, was a real occurrence, and not an imaginary adventure just invented by me for your amusement; you must remember the precise position of the tree (which was the veritable "Steele's May"), and Tom. It was right before him, and about four feet distant... The moon was obscured, and the night much darker than it had been when they lay down, sothat any one on the other side of the tree might easily overlook the dark recumbent figures of the sleeping boys. And just on the other side of the tree two men were bending over the prostrate figure of a third, and rifling his pockets as fast as they could, replying to his entreaties for mercy by oaths and jeers; but Tom was a bold boy, so pulling his red cotton handkerchief out he threw it over his face, and slowly rising, uttered a long-drawn sigh or groan. The moon was at his back, and its fitful, misty light gave Tom a shadowy appearance, and the thieves, who knew the legend of "Steele's May" well enough, gave a cry of horror and darted from the place. Tom took his handkerchief off and came towards the person whom he had rescued. He was getting slowly on his feet, but was so shaken by the attack made on him and the ghost-like appearance which had scared his assailants, that he was obliged to lean against the tree, gasping and breathless.

"I'm no ghost, sir," said Tom. "Here's my hand, if you like to feel if it's real flesh and blood. I hope I was in time to hinder those rascals from robbing you?"

The stranger felt in his pockets. "My purse is safe, and so is my pocket-book, and there was more in both than I should like to lose. But—but—"he felt in his great-coat pocket anxiously, "they have taken what is of far more consequence than money—they have robbed me of some very important papers! I would sooner have lost my purse and pocket-book ten times over than I would these."

He was evidently so concerned for his loss that Tom and Dick, who was now awake, felt quite sorry for him. They could only try to console by saying that as the papers could not be of any possible use to the thieves, they might restore them to him if he offered a reward. This might be, the gentleman owned; at any rate it was all he could do; and now feeling himself able to walk, he said that he would get to the Bell, where he meant to pass the night, and asked the boys which way they were going.

"To the Bell, too," replied Tom; and then told the stranger how it had happened that Dick and he were in the way when the robbers attacked him. To this the other replied that they must sup with him, and he would pay for their night's lodging and breakfast—it was the least he could do in return for the service Tom had rendered him. He would take no denial, and in a little time further the boys found themselves very comfortably installed in the best parlour of the Bell, with a tempting dish of lamb's fry smoking before them, to which, in spite of their supper off the pasties, they did ample justice. They found their entertainer a pleasant chatty person, although not able to shake off the annoyance the loss of his papers had caused him. While supper was preparing he had called the landlord in and acquainted him with his loss, stating that he had been attacked by thieves and robbed of some important papers, for the recovery of which he was willing to give fifty pounds, "and ask no questions," he added, significantly. He did not say a word about the ghost-it was as well, he told the boys when they were alone, for the rascals to think it was Steele himself who had scared them from their prey; but he asked the landlord if he would allow a placard offering a reward for the papers

to be placed in his taproom, as it was as well that its value to its present possessors should be known in the neighbourhood where they might still be lurking.

Mr. Slight made no objection. As he said, "all sorts came to the tap-room of an inn, and a landlord couldn't tell honest men from rogues, but must treat all alike as long as they behaved civilly and paid their score, and it was quite possible, though the thieves themselves might be afraid of venturing into such a public place, some of their friends might, and so they would learn that the papers they had gotwould be worth something to them if given up to the right owner. It was very likely, more than likely, he thought, that in a very short time the gentleman would have his papers again; only there was no doubt he would have to pay pretty handsomely for them."

That Mr. Garland said he was quite willing to do. The papers were of great consequence to him, and he was very ready to give fifty pounds for their restoration. Then the lamb's fry was brought in, and Mr. Garland did the honours of it to the boys, and when it was over he had a glass of hot brandy and water for himself, and some negus for Tom and Dick. They had never tasted it before, and found it very good indeed, and they all three got very sociable over their liquor,

and Mr. Garland told them of some of the sights of London that they must be sure to go and see, and led them on to speak of their journey up to town, and the life they had led in Bridgetown, and got quite interested in little Jack, and laughed heartily when Dick told him how Tom had taken farewell of his cousin Fred Jefferies.

Then he told them of himself. He was a solicitor, living near Gray's Inn. These papers belonged to a very wealthy client of his, and circumstances had occurred which made him think that it would be advisable to have counsel's. opinion upon them. For that purpose he had gone down the day before to Heston, a village a little distance from Hounslow, to submit the papers to an old friend of his, whom a fit of the gout confined to his country house. He had left after dinner, intending to take the mail, which passed through Hounslow every evening; but he was late in arriving at the high road. Heston lay some distance from it, and he found the coach had gone on. He walked on, intending to sleep at the Bell, and take the early coach the next morning, when he was attacked by the footpads, and despoiled of the very papers he had consulted his friend about. But, however, he had good hopes of their restoration; the landlord would take care the reward he offered should become known, and fifty pounds would be worth a great deal more to the rascals than a parcel of law papers. He asked Tom and Dick a few questions about Bridgetown and some of the people in it. He had been there some years ago upon business. The mayor that year was Mr. Brown, he heard, a gentleman in the same profession as himself.

"I know," said Dick, "and a fine mayor he made, the worst Bridgetown had had for many a long day—so folks said, for it was before my time; but he's a nice man, ain't he, Tom." Then Dick chuckled. "Tom's bashful, sir, and don't like to sing his praises. He's his own uncle, sir."

"In—deed!" said Mr. Garland, looking rather surprised and slightly incredulous.

"He married my mother's sister," said Tom, testily, "but I don't see that that makes him my uncle—does it, sir? if I don't want to own him?"

"Well, the relationship needn't distress you if you don't like the connexion," replied Mr. Garland, laughing; "for I suppose he didn't ask your consent to the marriage."

"I'd have said no if he had," replied Tom; "but I wasn't born when it took place; I suppose he and the doctor too are quite good

enough for the fine ladies they married. I don't call them aunts, you know, sir, though they were my mother's sisters. Mrs. Preston's worth a dozen of them."

"Yes, Tom's got some tidy relations," replied Dick; "that Fred Jefferies he laid in the nettles so nicely is one of them."

"But what relation is Mrs. Preston to him?" asked Mr. Garland, glancing curiously at Tom as he sipped his brandy and water.

"Married my mother's brother," replied Tom. "She's a good, kind lady; but he"—Tom's honest face grew dark as he continued—"wouldn't move his finger to save little Jack and me from the workhouse."

"Not a very nice uncle," said Mr. Garland.

"I should say not," replied Dick, indignantly. "Why, that old Quarle, miser as he is, is worth a dozen of him."

"What, is old Quarle a friend of yours?" asked Mr. Garland. "I saw something of him when I was at Bridgetown."

"Oh, no friend of Tom's," cried Dick, laughing. "At any rate, he wouldn't own him as such any more than he will his relations as aunt and uncle; but if ever the old man gets into a scrape—and he's an unlucky old fellow—Tom's always

the one to get him out of it. I don't know what he'll do now Tom's not in Bridgetown to look after him."

"As well as he did before I went there," replied Tom, a little sulkily. He was not too fond of hearing his good deeds to Quarle spoken of, feeling rather ashamed of them in fact. It seemed to him as if he had scarcely a right to befriend the man who had been so pitiless to his father; but Mr. Garland looked interested, and drew Dick on to tell him of the different adventures in which Quarle had figured, and Tom had helped him.

Soon after this he lit the bedchamber candle for the boys, saying it was time for them all to retire for the night, and Dick and Tom were ushered into a very comfortable room—a very different chamber to the one that would have been given them had they come by themselves. They had imagined that Mr. Garland was about to go to his own room at the same time they were shown into theirs; but when he found himself alone he drew his chair nearer the fireplace, and sat looking with folded hands into the fire for a while. His thoughts seemed anything but pleasant ones, and at last he rose, as if feeling it was worse than useless to entertain them any longer,

murmuring, as he did so, "This may be a bad thing for old Quarle, and a good one for the Squire; and on the whole I am inclined to think with my young friend Dick, that the miser's the best man of the two."





CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEARCH FOR WORK—SETTING UP IN HOUSE-KEEPING—THE NEW MASTER.

HE next morning Tom and Dick rose early, intending, after a frugal breakfast, to walk on to town; but Mr. Garland, who was down soon after they were, insisted on their breakfasting with him, and travelling by the coach. "You needn't mind letting me be paymaster," he added. "Remember, if it hadn't been for you I should have had my purse and pocket-book stolen as well as the papers."

They had a capital breakfast—it was long enough before they had such another—and the Windsor coach coming up soon after, they got on the outside, and entered London in very good style indeed. The coach stopped at the White Horse Cellar, and they all got down, Mr. Garland calling a hackney coach to take him to his office—neither cabs nor omnibuses were as yet in existence—and then turning to the boys,

he shook hands with them both, giving Tom his address, which he had written down on a leaf out of his pocket-book.

"There, my lads, I shall expect to see more of you; and when I do see you I hope I shall be able to tell you good news of the papers. Goodbye; there's something to go sight-seeing with."

He slipped a guinea in Tom's hand as he spoke, and jumped into the hackney-coach. Tom showed the money to Dick, who observed—

"When we do get a holiday, wont this treat us to a lot of sights? I say, Tom, this is a famous beginning, isn't it?"

But the beginning, on the whole, was not so good as Dick had imagined. On arriving at the house in Carnaby-street where Mrs. Wilkins's brother lived, they were rather startled to find the shop shut up, and all the upper window blinds drawn down. On knocking at the door it was answered by a middle-aged woman dressed in black, who looked like a respectable servant; and on their asking for Mr. Groom, she put her apron to her eyes, and with a mournful shake of the head informed them that he had died two days before. She took them into a tidy kitchen at the back of the shop, and there entered into further particulars, as she easily guessed from their appearance that they were the apprentices

from the country whom her master had told her of. Mr. Groom's illness had been very short, she said; not above five days. She thought one of the lodgers had written to Mrs. Wilkins. The landlord was trying to re-let the house already, and a tailor in the same street was in treaty for the shop. She didn't know whether Mrs. Wilkins would think it worth while to come to town, or whether she would leave the management of affairs to her and Mr. Groom's niece, to whom it was believed he had left all his property.

This was dreary news for Tom and Dick; how were they to obtain employment? and till they got it, where should they look for a home? They walked away very sadly, though the housekeeper pressed them to stay as long as they pleased; going on together and looking only for "a quiet place to talk things over in."

But quiet places, as they found after awhile, are not easily met with in London streets. At last they came to Bloomsbury-square, and here they walked up and down by the railings discussing their very unpleasant and unexpected position.

Dick was for stopping a couple of days in London, spending Mr. Garland's money in sight-seeing, and then returning home in a waggon as they had come. But Tom scouted the idea. "It

will never do to go back like that; the master has shut up his shop by this, and how can we ask him to open it for us? Besides, now we are in London my notion is to strike out and see what we can do for ourselves. There must be plenty of carpenters in want of boys, and we're both of us good hands at our trade. I've no notion of trudging back to Bridgetown till we've tried everything else. So now let's go and look out for a master, and then after awhile we'll see about some dinner."

They walked through Gray's Inn Road and Holborn, up Fleet-street and the Strand, but without seeing any carpenter's shop where they thought they might venture to ask for employment. Then they tried the by-streets, and here, though they met with shops of a humbler description, they were unsuccessful at each. Nobody wanted boys, especially country boys, and, tired out at last, they turned into a humble cookery shop and solaced themselves with a sixpenny plate of beef apiece and a pennyworth of pudding after it. They were so tired that they were glad to sit here some time after the meal was concluded, and then Tom suggested that they should see what money they had between them.

"There's Mr. Garland's guinea," he said, laying it on the table; "I expect we shall want

that for something else than sight-seeing now; and Mrs. General's five shillings, and the parson's two half-crowns; and three shillings the master gave me the last morning. All I'd saved before, I'd spent in buying a book for Jack. Well, that's one pound fourteen. How much have you, Dick?"

"Just the three shillings the master gave me, and a guinea besides, thanks to old Quarle," replied Dick, showing his money.

"Whatever made you take money from him?" asked Tom, angrily.

"Because you wouldn't," replied Dick; "it's well one of us has got a little sense. Besides, what was I to do? The old man came to the shop the last afternoon while you had gone to see little Jack, and after giving me a long talking to about the folly of going to London, and the troubles we should be sure to meet with there, he ended by giving me this guinea, and telling me that as you were such an odd fish—I don't think those were just his words, though—it was no use offering money to you, but I was to keep it in case anything went wrong, and we should want a little money. And a very good thing I did, for now we've just got two pounds eighteen between us."

"Then we shall have something to live on while we're waiting for work," said Tom; "but

we must have lodgings. If you're rested, Dick, shall we go and see where we can find a room?"

"What do you think of calling on Mr. Garland?" asked Dick; "perhaps he could help us. I'm sure he ought after the way you helped him."

"It seems too much like asking payment for it," replied Tom; "and it wasn't much to do, just shamming ghost for a minute. And he's not likely to know of any carpenters that want boys; and if he were to take us into his office out of charity, I don't think we should do much good to him, or ourselves either, in it. No, I should like to call on him again to know if he's got his papers back, for he's a pleasant gentleman, but I don't want to go as a beggar."

"Very well, then we wont go near him just yet," replied Dick; "so I suppose, as it's getting late, we must look out for a room. Fancy our being in furnished apartments to ourselves! Why, Tom, it's beginning housekeeping on our own account."

"I wish we'd got Mrs. Wilkins to begin it for us," said Tom; "but we must make the best of matters, and do as we can for ourselves. Here's a tidy-looking place with 'A Room to Let' in the window. Suppose we try here?"

But they found the rent of the "Room to Let" so much above their expectations that they went elsewhere, and looked out for houses of a humbler description; but even here the terms were more than their country in experience had led them to expect. Six, seven, eight shillings a week for a small, sparely-furnished, dingy-looking room seemed to the boys a wilful throwing away of money, so they turned into yet more shabbylooking streets and applied at the doors of still humbler houses. At last they found a room, tolerably clean, at the top of a house which appeared all let out to different lodgers. It had a sloping roof and a very small window, but the rent was only four shillings a week, and they resolved to take this. But here an unexpected difficulty met them-they had no luggage, and who was to be responsible for their paying the rent. Tom was inclined to be angry at first, when the landlady plainly told them that lodgers without either luggage or references would not suit her; it seemed such a natural thing to him that every one should be as convinced of his honesty as he was himself. Dick replied promptly, that their luggage was coming after them, but as the landlady did not know them they would pay a week's rent in advance, and if she wanted a reference, Mr. Garland of Herschelcourt, Gray's Inn, would, he had no doubt, give them one, showing her the gentleman's address as he spoke. This and the payment of the four shillings made matters go off pleasantly. The landlady was very anxious to let her room; it had been a long time vacant; and Dick and Tom were allowed at once to take possession of it. They were so thoroughly tired that after laying in a supply for the next day's breakfast and making a slender supper, they undressed and threw themselves on the hard flock bed, where they slept soundly till the morning.

The next day, directly after breakfast, they began again their weary quest for work. It was as unsuccessful as the day before, though they walked from one end of London to the other, and even far out into the suburbs, thinking that perhaps there they might meet with some small jobbing master like Seth Wilkins. They reached at last the stone that marks the spot where Dick Whittington sat and rested when the bells told him to "turn again, turn again, thrice lord mayor of London." It was the country all around it then, green fields and hedges with here and there a hayrick, or a cluster of cottages as rural as any to be found in Somersetshire. They sat down and rested by the stone.

"I wish the bells would sound and tell us

something," cried Dick; "Tom, this don't seem quite the right way to get to be lord mayor."

Tom sighed. If the bells had rung, he would not have cared for their telling him what they had told Mr. Osborne's apprentice; something very much less than that would have fully contented Tom; a little home for Jack and him to share together, and the wherewithal to keep it, that was all; but it seemed further off than ever.

They sat by the stone till the waning light told them it was time to return, and then wearily they walked back to their little close lodging, and went to sleep, wondering if the next day would bring them any better success. But it was day after day the same fruitless journeying; it seemed as if carpentering must be at a standstill, or boys at an utter discount, for either they were told wherever they applied that business was bad, and they had no room for more hands, or else that boys like them were not worth having. And all this time, careful as they were. their money grew less and less, till Dick began to urge upon Tom the wisdom of either returning home or asking Mr. Garland if he could assist them. It seemed as if they must adopt the latter course at last; and Tom agreed that if they did not find employment the next day, he would do so. But help came from a quarter

whence it was least expected, for the very afternoon after Tom had come to the resolution of asking Mr. Garland if he could help them, their landlady told them that her brother, who lived a short distance from her, was in want of a boy to work in his trade; he was a small jobbing carpenter, and as just now he was unusually busy, perhaps he could find employment for them both. Tom and Dick started off to see Mr. Webb: they found him in a small dingy shop, and his own appearance was anything but prepossessing. He was a dirty, shabbily-dressed man, who, if his appearance did not belie him greatly, was much fonder of the public-house than it behoved a respectable man to be. He drove a hard bargain with the boys, pretended he had not work enough for both, and that if he had, it was not likely they would be of any service to him.

"If you'll set us a job, and lend us some tools," said Tom, "we'll soon show you what we can do."

Mr. Webb took Tom at his word. A kitchen table had been sent to him to mend, and it was anxiously expected back by its owner, who had entrusted it to Mr. Webb three weeks ago upon a promise that it should be returned in as many days, but though it only required a couple of

hours' work, that exemplary tradesman had not yet touched it. He told the boys now to see what they could do with it, directed them where to find the requisite tools, and then sat by and smoked his pipe while they repaired the table. They did it in a manner that showed Mr. Webb they had been taught their business by one who understood it, and he condescended to say, "That considering they were boys, and country boys too, it wasn't so bad," and then he began to treat with them.

"Five shillings a week apiece is as much as such boys as you are worth; and if I take the two you ought to come for nine between you—and then I shall be out of pocket by it; it's really almost taking you for charity."

But Tom and Dick knew better. They were perfectly aware that they had been worth a good deal more than five shillings a week each to Seth Wilkins, and that they could work much too well at their trade for any one to employ them out of charity. So they began to bargain too, and the end of it was that Mr. Webb, who saw that they would be able to do a great deal which would leave him plenty of time to smoke his pipe, agreed to pay them jointly fifteen shillings, and they were to come the next morning at six o'clock to begin work. Then Tom

and Dick went away rejoicing, and treated themselves to a savoury supper of sausages, and the next morning at ten minutes to six Mr. Webb was roused from his slumbers by his two new assistants knocking at the door.





CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW DICK AND TOM GET ON AT MR. WEBB'S—MR.

GARLAND HEARS OF THE STOLEN DEED—THE VOICE
FROM THE WALL—A RACE WITH THE THIEVES.

OM and Dick knocked and waited for full twenty minutes before the door was opened, which it was at last by a tall, thin, slatternly-looking woman, whom they found to be Mrs. Webb. She directed them to take down the shutters, and then, if they liked, they might sweep out the shop, and perhaps by that time Mr. Webb would be down and tell them what to do; then she retired into the back part of the house, and began making preparations for breakfast in a kitchen that would have driven Mrs. Wilkins crazy with its dirt and untidiness; and the boys set to work to do as she directed them, making a few comments as they did so upon the state of things at Mr. Webb's.

"I expect we've got a different mistress to the

one at home," said Dick. He and Tom always spoke of Bridgetown as home now.

"And a different master, too," replied Tom.

"Never mind, we'll do our duty by him just the same; and I'll write home to little Jack tonight, and tell him we've got places. And on Sunday we'll put on our best things and go and see Mr. Garland."

The boys were quite right. Their new employer and his wife were very different people to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins. Mr. Webb spent half his time either in the public-house or in smoking at home. And he never worked when he smoked, but sat with a mug of ale by his side, looking on at the boys and giving them his directions. Now and then he took a hammer or a chisel in his own hand, but whatever he did was performed in such a careless, listless way, so thoroughly half done in fact, that Tom, who had been brought up both on his father's farm and in Seth Wilkins's shop to do his work honestly and manfully, as work, of whatever kind it is, should be done, longed to take the tools from his hands and perform his master's work himself. But this was not the only annoyance to both Dick and him. Seth Wilkins was a just man, one who did his duty to his customers thoroughly, who would as soon have thought of

picking their pockets as of scamping his work. or using green unseasoned wood. No boy apprenticed to him could well be other than an honest tradesman. But Mr. Webb used the worst and cheapest materials, and put in the most slovenly work, and, so long as the boys did their tasks quickly, would have liked them to do the same. But this was more than he could get them to do; of course they were obliged to use such wood as he gave them, but they could not bring themselves to do their "I've never tasks in the manner he wished. been taught," Tom told him, "to half do things, and I think, myself, the best way is the quickest in the long run."

After a time, as Webb found they were much more diligent than any whom he had ever employed before, and that they worked equally well whether or not he was present to look after them, he let them have their own way, and found he was giving his customers more satisfaction than he had ever yet done; by degrees they got him to buy better wood, for, as Tom said, it took the heart out of a fellow to put good work on "bad stuff," and though Mr. Webb smoked and drank even more than ever, he found his trade improving, thanks to his assistants.

As to Mrs. Webb, she was a woful contrast in every respect to Mrs. Wilkins. A slatternly, slipshod woman, untidy in herself and her surroundings; always doing, never done; who never seemed to think it worth trying to make her husband's home more tempting than the public-house; fretful and complaining, and never able to fight against her little household cares and troubles. Tom and Dick thought sadly of their hopeful, helpful mistress at home whenever they looked at Mrs. Webb.

There was one thing to be said—she had a swarm of small children, little creatures who infested the shop, mislaid the tools, scratched themselves with the nails, and cut their fingers with the saw. Tom and Dick were both fond of children, but the little Webbs were too much for their patience. They were dirty-faced, cross, crying little things, for ever in the way, and the baby cried the most of all. As Mrs. Webb said, it was never out of arms—she certainly seemed always to have it in hers; if she came. as she very often did, to have a gossip at the door, there was the everlasting baby, with its dirty nose and its perpetual cry, drowning every word she said, and making Tom and Dick sigh more than ever for the good time gone by when they were in Seth Wilkins's shop, which no child

but little Jack had ever been permitted to invade.

At last the baby took a fancy to Tom. would be good with him when so with no one else. so when he had a few minutes to spare he would take it from Mrs. Webb, and now and then stop after time to nurse the baby and play with the other children, while Dick, who, Mrs. Wilkins had often said, was almost as handy as a girl, would assist the poor shiftless woman in some of her household duties, till by degrees they became almost friends; and sometimes when Webb was out late at the public-house, and the baby sitting still on Tom's lap, while the other children were watching him build houses of spare bits of wood from the shop, and Dick had tidied up the fireplace and made the room look comparatively comfortable, she would tell them of her early days before she married Webb and came to live in London,—days when she was a happy, merry girl, at home in her father's farm, and used to go a maying or a nutting with her schoolfellows. It was very strange, but more sad than strange, that the pale, fretful woman should ever have been a bright-faced rosy country girl, and Tom and Dick grew to like her better when they knew of it, and were more ready than ever to help with the children, and,

as Dick said, "there was nothing like making the best of things," so they made the best of Mrs. Webb.

They had been to see Mr. Garland the first Sunday after entering on their new employ. They found him living in chambers in Gray's Inn, at that time of day a more usual thing for lawyers to do than it is now. He received them very kindly, told them he had been expecting them before, and asked how they had been getting on. They did not dwell too much upon their troubles, but contented themselves with telling him of Mr. Groom's death, and the change it had made in their own prospects, but added, that they were now both in work, and hoped to do well.

Mr. Garland told them he had heard nothing as yet of the papers, though he had posted placards all over London offering the reward. He had now put the matter in the hands of the Bow Street runners, and hoped they would be able to give him some intelligence. He thought of doubling—trebling the reward if necessary; as, if the papers were not recovered, it might lead to his client losing some thousands. He looked very anxious and annoyed as he spoke, but brightened up presently, and made the boys partake of wine and fruit. Then he bade them

good-bye, as he was going out to dinner, telling them to be sure and come again soon to see him, and if they were in any difficulty to make no scruple about applying to him to help them out of it.

Things went on as I have described at Mr. Webb's for about six months, during which time Tom and Dick went rather often to Mr. Garland's, who was always glad to see them, but who had as yet heard nothing of his papers, though he had offered a reward of two hundred pounds for them. What a fortune this seemed to the boys, living as best they could upon sixteen shillings a week. Mr. Webb with great difficulty had been prevailed on to give them another shilling, but they found it no easy matter to manage upon that. They were growing boys. and ate a great deal, and their clothes wore out very fast; so fast that after a time they began to feel rather ashamed of visiting Mr. Garland, or even of going to church. Provisions were very dear just then, and with all Dick's good management—and he had, for a boy, a wonderful turn for housekeeping—they found their present sordid fare a sad change from Mrs. Wilkins's table; as, after they had paid for their lodgings, they had only twelve shillings a week remaining. They had written home several times, so that most people

in Bridgetown knew how they were getting on; for Mrs. General had Jack often to see her when he was at Mrs. Wilkins's, and then she learnt from him all he knew about his brother, besides which, she never passed Harry Swain without speaking to him, and asking if he had had any news of his friends; and as Mrs. Wilkins and Mrs. General both knew pretty well how far sixteen shillings a week would go when two boys had to provide themselves with everything out of it. they endeavoured, as far as they could, to eke out the slender pittance. Whenever Dobbs the waggoner came to town he brought something for them with him; only that as the waggon was generally a week in coming it was not advisable to send anything by it of a very perishable na-But Tom and Dick were well supplied with ham and bacon, and as the weather grew colder. Mrs. Wilkins forwarded them some warm knitted socks, and a hamper of apples, which were liberally shared with the little Webbs. Mrs. General spoke to the parson, and told him it was a great shame that a boy like Tom should be drudging for eight shillings a week, and told him too that it was his duty, as rector of the parish, to look after Tom's relations, and see that they did their duty by him. But the parson only laughed—"That's rather a hopeless task, my

dear madam, and I think Tom is just as well where he is. A little roughing never does a boy any harm, and Tom will fight his own way in the world well enough."

But when the parson got home he wrote a short letter, equally intended for Tom and Dick, but addressed to the former, in which he told them to let him know if they were in any difficulty and wanted a little help, and they should be sure to have it from him. "I know I am safe in telling you this," he added. "You are not the lads to be scared at trifles, or to think that climbing up the hill is altogether smooth work, so I know you wont ask for assistance unless you need it; but if you do, remember, I shall be seriously angry unless you claim it."

The parson prepaid the postage of his letter, and it pleased the boys very much. Not that they thought of applying to him, though Tom's toes were poking through his shoes, and Dick's jacket was out at elbows, but these were only trifles—not things to trouble the parson about; but they were proud of his remembering and writing to them, and of his confidence, that though they might find up-hill work hard, still it was up-hill, after all; and his trust, that though he told them to ask for help when they needed it, they would

not do so but under a serious necessity. They took great care of this letter—I believe Tom has it yet; and so they did of all that Mr. Dennes sent them—kind, gentle letters his always were, full of cautions and advice from Mr. Wilkins, and loving messages from his wife, and tender, earnest prayers from the old minister himself that the boys, so far away in the wide world, so left to their own guidance, might take heed to their ways, and never forget that though fatherless on earth, they were still watched over by their Father in heaven.

So on the whole Tom and Dick were not much to be pitied, though their fare was scanty and their clothes threadbare. In after years they looked back lovingly enough to that old time in London, in the little attic with its hard bed, and its look-out over the chimney-pots of the neighbouring houses.

One Sunday afternoon about the middle of November, they thought they would go and see Mr. Garland. It was a dull, foggy day; and so the shabbiness of their attire would be less perceptible. Dick resolved to keep his great-coat on in the house, even if Mr. Garland asked him to take it off, that the state of his jacket might not be seen. Tom's boots were a trouble to them both; there was a hole in the upper

leather, just where the big toe protruded, but after considering a while Dick resolved to blacken the sock underneath, and then he thought Tom might pass muster. "And next week," he said, "we'll stop the coffee, and try toast-andwater instead, of a morning, made hot, with a little treacle in it, and see if we can't squeeze out enough by Saturday for a pair of boots for you, Tom; we'll leave off cheese for supper too, and have roast apples instead—they'll be a deal more wholesome—so in another week we may be able to pay for mending my jacket; and I think after Christmas we must speak to Webb about another rise."

They found Mr. Garland at home, but looking careworn and annoyed. He brightened up a little when he saw them, and shook hands with them heartily; then said, "I've heard about those papers at last."

Tom and Dick were very pleased that he had, and told him so; but Mr. Garland continued, "The rascals that have got them want to drive a tight bargain with me. See, here is a letter I received from them by last night's post."

He produced a dirty, blotted piece of paper, with a thick, blurred scrawl running over it, and handed it to the boys, who read—

"RESPICKTED SIR,

"It havin' cum to my nolledge that yu're willin' to giv' a price for sum papers wich wos took from you near Hounslo six months back, am agreeble to giv' you back the same knowin' the parties as has them, but you must raise the figger. 2 wont do, it must be 3 and 2 oughts. If agreeble to this, walk out on Monday, at 11 in the mornin', down the streat, with your umbereller in your left hand, and I will let you no where the papers may be found, wich shall be giv' up to you as soon as you giv' up the flimsies. Should hav' rote sooner, but hav' been out of town sinse last May.

"Yours obedent, "None Knows Who."

"There," said Mr. Garland, "what do you think of that, my boys? I suppose the rascals have been out of the way since last May, or I should have heard from them sooner; and so I may think myself very fortunate that if they were in hiding they did not destroy the papers. But it's a nice sum to pay for their recovery—three hundred pounds! I'm afraid I must give it them, though. I don't think I can do much else than walk down the street with my 'umbereller' in my left hand to-morrow."

"I'd rather take a good stout cudgel to thrash the rascals with if I saw them," said Tom. "You'll know them again when you see them, wont you, sir?"

"You don't think they'll give me the chance, do you, Tom?" said Mr. Garland, laughing. "If I thought that, you may be sure I should have a couple of constables behind me. No, they'll take care to be near enough to see in which hand I carry my umbrella, but I shall not be able to catch a glimpse of them. I'm afraid there's nothing for it but to give the rascals their price; it's a heavy pull, but I can't let my client lose a freehold estate worth——"

Mr. Garland stopped suddenly, and looked curiously at Tom, as if to see what he thought of his last words; but Tom knew too little of either law or lawyers to understand how anybody could lose such an unmistakeable solid piece of property as a landed estate because somebody else had had some papers stolen from him. But Mr. Garland seemed not to care to talk of the subject any more, for he turned the conversation to something else, and rang for wine and cake for the boys, and soon after they took their leave.

Dick and Tom were full of speculation as they went home as to whether or no Mr. Garland would walk down the street the next morning

with his umbrella in his left hand, and what would next happen if he did. Three hundred pounds seemed such a preposterous price to pay for the recovery of a few papers; and they puzzled themselves with wondering how the thieves would contrive to see without being seen, whether or no Mr. Garland agreed to comply with their demands. They wished very much they could be in the street at eleven o'clock the next morning, but that they knew to be out of the question. Mr. Webb was a very different person to Mr. Wilkins, and not a man to give even an hour's leisure if he could help it. But they resolved to go round the next Sunday, and inquire of Mr. Garland if he had obtained the papers, and felt that they must be content to wait till then.

The next afternoon, when they came in from dinner, Mr. Webb informed them he had a job for them out of doors. "It's No. 2, Carden-street, near the Strand. The man's been round to say the wainscot at one part of the wall is broken away, and his landlord says he's bound to make it good. Deal will do; paint it over to-morrow. It's been done with oak, but the folks that live in the house now ain't quite so nice in their notions as those that built it. Go off at once, for I expect it will take you the rest of the day, both of you; and I'll mind the shop."

The boys put up the necessary materials and started off, glad of a little change from the workshop, and pleased too that their task would employ them together. They were soon at Cardenstreet, and knocking at the door of No. 2.

"A queer-looking street, and a queer-looking house," said Dick, while they were waiting to be let in.

Dick was right; the street had a worn-out, shabby, dirty look, as if it had seen better days, and was now brooding over the remembrance of them. The houses were large but sadly dilapidated, and had evidently been built for a very different class to those who now inhabited them. In truth, Carden-street in the time of the second Charles, and as late as the second George, had been inhabited by wealthy noblemen and gentlemen about the Court, but each house was now let out to nearly a dozen different lodgers, whose children played in the streets and made mud pies in the gutters. There were two or three plates on every one of the house-doors, some of the upper windows were mended with paper, and in several of the lower ones bills were to be seen announcing that Miss Minkin took in dressmaking, or Mr. Tatton mended boots. was the largest house in the street, and had originally been built by a bishop whose Jacobite tendencies nearly brought him into serious trouble in the time of George I. It was a house that in a country town would have had a hundred legends about it, and would certainly have been haunted by a couple of ghosts, if not more; at least, it would have had the credit of being haunted, which, I think, for all practical purposes, is quite as good a thing. Tom and Dick thought of old Quarle as they stood outside this dismantled, decaying dwelling, and wondered whether any of its occupants in the least resembled him.

The one who opened the door at any rate did not. He was a stout, elderly man, with a pleasant face and an apron, wearing no coat, and his shirt-sleeves being tucked up above his elbows. He was the master of the house, Mr. Green, whose name was on the door with "Printer" below it. He kept the lower rooms and the back attic for himself, and had a large workshop at the rear of the house where he carried on his trade. He looked surprised when he saw the boys, each with his carpenter's basket, especially when Dick informed him they had come from Mr. Webb to mend the wainscot.

"I thought Mr. Webb would have come himself," he replied; "what do such youngsters as you know of carpentering?" "Quite enough for all we shall have to do here," replied Dick; "you'll find we know our business better than you think for, master. Only show us the way, please, and let us begin at once."

Mr. Green led the way up a wide broad staircase, the balusters of which were of massive carved oak, and the landing-places as big as little rooms. On these landings different doors opened, and some of them were open, and the boys could hear the crying of children, the scolding of their mothers, and other sounds which showed that however much in some respects the decayed old mansion might resemble Quarle's habitation, it did not aspire to rival it in its stillness and seclusion. On they went-up, up, up, till they began to pant for breath, but Mr. Green still went forward, and never paused till he was at the very top of the house. This was a smaller landing than any below, and several doors opened on it, while a step-ladder led to a trap-door on the roof of the house. This door was partly open—Mr. Green generally kept it so, as he said it served as a ventilator and skylight to the rest of the dwelling. He opened the door of a large front room, saving,—

"My lodgers are out, and wont be in till the evening. I suppose if you look sharp you'll get

done by that time, for they don't much like having you here."

He pointed out the decaying wainscot to the boys, and then, leaving them, went downstairs to his workshop; while Dick and Tom began knocking away the decayed wood preparatory to replacing it with sound. The room was furnished with tolerable comfort, though everything in it was old-fashioned and plain. Mr. Green let this apartment furnished, having just enough household goods to enable him to do so aften his own requirements were satisfied. There was a bed in one corner, with faded hangings and counterpane, and on the round table near the fireplace, in which the fire was still burning, lay a couple of pipes and two empty pewter pots. Indeed the whole room smelled unpleasantly of beer and tobacco, so much so that Tom presently opened one of the windows to let a little fresh air in. When he had done so he looked round the room and observed—

"Well, it is a strange place—wainscoted up to the very ceiling. One don't often see upper rooms like that; and what a thickness this front wall must be. Why, it can't be less than three feet, Dick, between the inside of the room and the out."

"What stupids they were not to make a cup-

board in the thickness," said Dick, hammering away. "Now, Tom, look sharp, or we shan't be done before the lodgers come home. A nice sort they must be too, to judge by the pipes and the pots."

Tom left the window, and began again to work, and with such diligence that before it grew dark they had completed the job. Then they packed up their tools neatly, and Tom began again to look about him.

"Well, I don't think in any house but my father's I ever did see such a thick wall, Dick; and look at the carving round the top of it. Those flowers are famously done. Dick, I wish you and I could turn out something like that."

"Wouldn't pay now-a-days," said the practical Dick. "It's out of fashion completely. But what donkeys they were to go wasting space like this, taking ever so much off the size of the room and not turning it to any account. What a capital cupboard for clothes they might have made here, Tom. It would have taken a few more than you and I have got to fill it."

Dick tapped the wall as he spoke, with his knuckles. He started at the sound it gave, and taking the hammer out of his basket struck it several times, listening attentively. Then he turned to Tom,—"I'm positive it's hollow!—

We've found something out—it's a secret cupboard. This house is a very old one, and I don't suppose any one here knows of this place. There's no knowing what we may find in it—a skeleton very likely—it's just the sort of house for half a dozen murders to have been done in, and this is just the right hiding place for them. I'm determined to get it open."

"But I don't see what business you have to meddle with it," said Tom, looking quietly on, while Dick kept peering about the panelling, and inserting his chisel wherever he thought the opening of the secret door might be.

"Well, I don't know that I have," replied Dick, pursuing his self-imposed task diligently; "but we'll talk about that afterwards. Just come and help us, that's a good fellow. I'm persuaded this is where the door opens. Look, this line runs straight up till it's lost in the carving, and my belief is continues underneath, and that all these flowers and fancies were only put to hide it."

"I've read of such places," said Tom.

"I've heard tell of them," replied Dick. "There was an old house my grandfather used to tell of —but we needn't mind about that now. I'm sure the door's giving. Now, Tom, what do you think we shall find inside?—I say a skeleton."

"Two, if you like," said Tom; "but I don't

think myself there'll be anything in it but dust and cobwebs. But you're right, it is a door, and was never meant for us to find out. Here it comes!"

So the door did; for it gave way to the united efforts of the boys' chisels, and slowly swung back; but there was no skeleton inside—nothing but what Tom had said, dust and cobwebs. He looked a little disappointed himself at finding his words come true, and Dick was at first quite crestfallen. He recovered himself presently, however, and observed, "Well, I was right, it was a door, at any rate, and a secret cupboard. Now, Tom, what could this have been put here for? They never would have taken such pains to hide a place that was only meant to hold clothes or dirty linen—and it's such a size! Why, we could both stand upright in it!"

So they did; and then they examined the cupboard still more carefully. There was no doubt that at one time or another it had been a hiding-place, for one of the bricks of the outer wall was perforated, so as to let in air; then the door had a fastening *inside*, and Dick shut himself in, and found that the heads of two griffins carved on the outer panelling had been so judiciously carved that he could see and hear whatever took place in the room through the

openings formed by each of their mouths. If the boys had been acquainted with the history of the old house, they would have known that the Jacobite bishop had had this cupboard constructed under his own direction, by a master carpenter sworn to secrecy, and that it had stood his lordship in good stead as a hiding-place for dangerous papers or for emissaries from the Pretender, when the house had been searched in vain to discover one or the other.

Dick amused himself by talking to Tom through the griffins' mouths, and then let himself out. Tom was about to go in, when he heard voices on the stairs—voices that he had only heard once before, but under such circumstances as prevented their being easily forgotten. Dick recognised them too. The boys started and looked at each other, and then, as if moved by one impulse, darted into the cupboard, snatching up their baskets and tools with them. They fastened the door, and then stood panting and breathless, listening to the voices that came nearer and nearer, and the possessors of which were soon in the room without.

Presently Tom applied his eye to one griffin's head, Dick to the other. They were about a foot apart, so the distance was convenient, and the boys were convinced that the two men they now

looked upon were the very same as the footpads of Hounslow Heath. They sat down by the fire, thrust some wood in to make it burn up better, and then clearing part of the table from the pots and pipes, one unlocked a small leather valise, and produced therefrom a parcel neatly tied up in brown paper. He flung it on the table, saying—

"Who'd have thought when we robbed the old cove of these that they'd have been worth so much. To think of his marching down the street with his umbrella in his left hand. I didn't think he'd do it."

"I did, somehow," replied the other. "Papers is worth a sight more sometimes than one reckons on. It's a pity, I think, we didn't make it four instead of three. He'd have given it just as easy."

"Have a conscience—have a conscience—do," replied his friend, "even when you're dealing with a lawyer. But, I think, before we part with them we ought to see what they're about; they may be worth more to other people than even to Muster Garland."

He untied the brown paper, and something that, if the boys had known a little more of legal matters, they would have recognised at once as a deed from some lawyer's office was spread upon the table. The thieves looked at it curiously. The stiff, legal writing appeared to puzzle them,

and above all the opening words, written in black letter.

"Is it a will?" asked Mr. Jephson, the elder of the two, who was not so good a scholar as his friend. "If it is, it may be worth a good deal more nor three hundred to the parties as wants to come into the property."

"No; I think it's something about 'prentices," replied the other, who bore the name of Dogget, spelling the opening words with his forefinger. "It begins, 'This Indenture.'"

"Oh, it can't be that," said Mr. Jephson.
"The old buffer wouldn't give three hundred just for indentures, when he could have any 'prentice bound to him three times over for the money. What's the names of the parties—can you make that out?"

"Well, I suppose these are them," replied his friend, going a little lower down the parchment; "between Harly Preston, of—of—'somewhere, in the County of Somerset, gentleman, of the one part, and Jacob Quarle; why, hang it," and he struck his fist furiously on the table, "if we haven't come across that old beggar again!"

"It's something that concerns him, is it?" said Jephson. "I wish we'd looked at it before we let the old buffer in Gray's Inn know of it."

"There's no harm done," replied Dogget;

"and if we can't get more from the old Jew in Somerset—or Preston, whoever he may be—why, we know we're safe for three hundred from Garland; so we'll keep the papers for a while at any rate, and see what we had better do with them."

"Try if you can't spell out a bit more about them," said Mr. Jephson, taking up his pipe and beginning to smoke, while Mr. Dogget, proud of his superior scholarship, bent over the parchment, and, with his forefinger to help him, tried to read the lines. All this time the two boys had been listening attentively to what was going on. They were afraid to speak to each other, even in a whisper; and though a glimmering of light came through the perforated bricks in the outer wall, it was not sufficient to allow them to see each other's faces. All they could do in these circumstances was to carry on a conversation by nudges and pokes in each other's ribs and most boys know that a good deal may be said by pokes and nudges, varied now and then by a pinch, when it is necessary to convey anything very emphatic; and no words were ever vet invented that could convey all that can be expressed by a good firm hand grip, like the one with which Tom and Dick clenched the

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voiceless colloquy they had been carrying on in the dark. It meant something like this—

Tom to Dick—"They're a pair of rascals, ain't they?"

Dick to Tom—" Shouldn't I just like to serve them out!"

Dick and Tom simultaneously—"I'm with you," and "I'm with you! Hurrah!"

Such a quiet hurrah! only expressed by the grip of the fingers; but it did the boys a great deal of good notwithstanding. Then Dick, who was the best vocalist of the two, opened his mouth and emitted a low, faint, unearthly moan, which in the waning light, and coming from the very centre of the wall, made Mr. Dogget and his friend start and look uneasily about them.

"It's only the wind," said the former. "But it's getting plaguy dark. I can't see a word. I'll go below and fetch a candle."

Mr. Jephson did not quite like being left alone, but he stirred the fire into a blaze, and puffed his pipe with redoubled vigour. Mr. Dogget went downstairs, and as soon as he was gone Dick thought it as well to send forth another moan.

"Hang the wind! I can't stand this!" cried Mr. Jephson, looking round uneasily. "Wind, indeed! It seems to come right from the very

middle of that wall. I wish Dogget would be quick back."

But Mr. Dogget was some time in coming. He had a difficulty in finding his candlestick, which Mrs. Green had taken down to clean, and then more difficulty in lighting the candle; and he did not fancy coming up the long staircase alone in the dark; and the time of his absence Dick improved by uttering moans that thrilled Mr. Jephson's heart to the very core. He was full of superstitious fancies and beliefs, as bad men generally are, and the fright on Hounslow Heath had added to these feelings. He was half ashamed of them himself, and sat fidgeting uncomfortably, becoming every moment more and more alarmed, till at last he burst out with "Dang it! I can't stand this any longer. I'll go on the leads for a hit."

He stepped out of the room, closing the door after him, and ran up the step-ladder to the leads which served Mrs. Green and her lady lodgers as a drying ground. He stood by the door looking down to see that no one entered the room but Dogget, who reappeared presently bearing a lighted candle in his hand. Jephson was about to come down at once, but Mrs. Green detained him, with a request that he would help her down

with her basket of clean linen, and it would have been too ungallant of Mr. Jephson to refuse her request. Accordingly, he descended the step ladder first, and taking the basket from the lady carried it down to the landing, when she followed and took it herself, and he again entered his apartment.

He found Mr. Dogget standing by the fire, looking round with an expression of blank dismay on his face. He brightened up, however, when he saw his friend. "Oh, you're there, are you? What have you done with the paper?"

"The paper!—what paper?" And then Mr. Jephson looked on the table and saw that the precious parchment, which was worth three hundred pounds to himself and his friend, had gone! And he knew that since he left the room no one but Dogget had entered it. A cold sweat stood on his forehead, his knees shook, and he murmured, feebly, "It's gone!"

"Yes, it's gone," said Dogget, "but what have you done with it? And whatever did you leave the room for while I was away?"

"I—I—never lost sight of the door," said Jephson.

"Then you've got it about you somewhere.

Come, hand it out. I'm not going to stand that. It's as much mine as yours, you know."

"I—I—haven't got it," cried Jephson, trembling more than ever.

"Then who has?" cried Dogget, angrily. "Don't try that nonsense upon me. I'll throttle you but I'll make you give it up."

He sprang forward and seemed about to carry out his threat, when a groan from the centre of the wall struck on his ear and made him pause. "What's that?" he cried, feeling a little alarmed himself.

"It—it—it's took the paper," groaned Jephson. "I got so scared with its noise I couldn't abide it more, and ran on to the leads. I'll take my oath I never lost sight of the door for a minute, and left the 'denture, or whatsomever, it is, on the table—and now it's gone—who took it?"

"Steele's ghost!" was breathed from the wall in accents so awful that Dogget and Jephson both turned pale with fear, taking hold of each other as if to gather courage from the contact. "There—there—there can't be any one hiding?" gasped the former.

"It's a solid wall," replied his friend; "who could get into that?"

"Steele's ghost!" was breathed from the wall;

and crying out, "I'll be shot if I stand this any longer!" Jephson rushed out of the room, and catching sight of some petticoats above, ran up the step-ladder and on to the leads, where two or three of the lodgers were doing as Mrs. Green had done, and taking in the clothes they had hung to dry.

Mr. Dogget stopped behind for a second, but he did not feel brave enough to cope with the ghost alone, and he rushed up the step-ladder after his friend; and while the two stood with pale faces and chattering teeth, listening to the questions poured upon them by the ladies on the leads, Dick softly opened the cupboard door and peered out.

"They've gone," he said; "and I think we had better go too. Is it all right, Tom?"

"Buttoned up safe inside my jacket," said Tom, setting his teeth. "They'll have some work to get it, I think, even if they do catch us."

They slipped out of the room, taking care to shut the cupboard door behind them, and ran down the stairs quickly but as quietly as they could. Not so quietly, however, but that Mr. Dogget's sharp ears heard them, and calling on Jephson to follow, he sprang down the stepladder on to the landing, and looked down the

staircase. It was one of the kind called "well," and by the light which came from some of the lodgers' open doors he could see the figures of two boys bearing carpenter's baskets in their hands. One glance was enough; he knew that the wainscot of the room he shared with Jephson was to have been mended, and he remembered having seen shavings about on his return home. Quick as lightning these thoughts flashed through his mind, and almost as quickly he tore down the staircase, with Jephson after him. Tom and Dick looked back and saw that they were pursued, and, what was more, that their pursuers were gaining on them. They knew nothing of the character of the house, it might be a den of thieves for aught they could tell, and even if they were amongst honest men, the thieves' story might be believed before their own, so on they ran, hoping to reach the street door before their pursuers; but if it should be shut, they might be captured even while opening it. There was a window on the last flight of the staircase; it was open, and Tom saw that it looked out on some leads, which were, in fact, the roof of Mr. Green's workshop, and right across the centre, dividing the leads in half and forming what many boys would have thought an insurmountable barrier, ran a high raised skylight, six feet wide and extending from

one side of the leads to the other. No getting round, no running across, no footing for anything but a cat on that slippery, frail glass surface. Nothing for it but a jump, with the risk of falling through if you did not jump well-nothing for it but a jump, a bold one and a good, Tom and Dick saw, as they sprang out of the window. But over it they went, thanks to the practice they had had in the west country in clearing brooks and ditches, and were safely on the other side just as a grand clatter and smashing of glass, mixed with oaths and imprecations from the two thieves, told them that they had attempted to follow their example, and had come to grief accordingly. Down they went, almost on Mr. Green's head, just as he was setting up the type for a tradesman's bill; but, luckily for him, he started back in time to save himself, crying, "Bless me! what's that?" just as Dogget, and Jephson on the top of him, came toppling down on the printing-press.

Tom and Dick got to the edge of the leads and drew breath; then they looked down on the street below, and saw that it was all quiet and still—not a single person in it. The leads were only ten feet from the ground, a height they could very well drop, and they did so, and then ran all the way to Mr. Garland's residence,

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anxious to ascertain at once if the parchment they had with such difficulty secured, was indeed the document whose loss had caused him such distress, and for the recovery of which he had offered so large a sum.





CHAPTER XIX.

DICK AND TOM ASK MR. GARLAND FOR NEW CAPS-LITTLE JACK IS TO BE MADE A SCHOLAR OF.

R. GARLAND had just finished dinner when Tom and Dick arrived at his residence, and was slowly sipping a glass of old port, which, with a Stilton in a fine state of bluemould, formed his dessert. He looked surprised at seeing the boys, as they had never before been to visit him but of a Sunday, and with their flushed and not very clean faces, rough hair, and working clothes, they were in very different trim to that in which they usually appeared before him. They had got their baskets with them, but they had not got on their caps, these having tumbled off in their flight with the deed, and, as they were pretty good ones. Dick had been rather concerned at their loss when he had time to discover it, which was not till they stood at the door of Mr. Garland's house waiting for admittance.

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Tom, with a little im the while to keep You we, we look on "Never mind," said Tom; "I dare say if these are the right papers, he wont mind giving us new ones; they wont cost him quite as much as the three hundred the thieves wanted from him."

Then the door opened, and in another minute they stood before Mr. Garland; and Tom, placing the document in his hand, said—

"Is this what you lost on Hounslow Heath, sir?"

Mr. Garland took it eagerly, turned it over, opened it and examined it carefully. It was a large deed which had taken him some time to draw up, and his clerk some time to engross, but it did not appear to have suffered from the strange hands into which it had fallen; and with a long-drawn breath of satisfaction he folded it up, and asked the boys how they had obtained possession of it? That was soon told, and Mr. Garland listened with intense delight to the narrative Tom repeated, and rubbed his hands with glee when he heard of the smash of the glass caused by the thieves falling through the skylight. Presently, however, he looked sharply at Tom, and asked him if he had read the deed?"

"I should be sorry to try," said Tom, laughing.
"What little I heard those fellows say about it was quite enough to show that it wasn't in my line. It's queer too, sir, that there should be my

uncle's name — Mr. Preston's I mean," added Tom, correcting himself, "and Mr. Quarle's mixed up in it. Somehow I'm always coming across that old fellow, and doing him a good turn without meaning it. Will it be any good to him, sir, Dick and I getting this deed from the rascals?"

"Possibly," replied Mr. Garland, shortly; and then added to himself, "Knows nothing and suspects nothing—so much the better. Mr. Preston, Mr. Preston, if you'd done your duty by your nephew, you might have been the Squire of Prest-hope still. Well, well, I think when we come to a final settlement it is as well you should know how the deed was lost and how recovered, in which case you may think that it would have been a better thing if you had kept Master Tom in Somersetshire."

The old lawyer smiled at this reflection, and looked thoughtfully at the fire for a few seconds. Then he turned to the boys.

"Well, my lads, how about the three hundred pounds I was going, as you know, to give those villains? I suppose you'll expect a share of it for yourselves?"

"Well, yes, sir," replied Tom, with a little hesitation, Dick nudging him the while to keep him up to the mark. "You see, we lost our 288

caps in jumping over the skylight, and we can't just yet afford to buy new ones. So if you wouldn't mind giving them to us we should be obliged. I don't think they'll be more than eighteenpence apiece."

"So I'm to get my deed cheaply back it seems," said Mr. Garland. "Three shillings instead of three hundred pounds. But we can't quite settle matters in that way. You mustn't keep all the honesty in the world to yourselves, my boys, though you seem to have more than your fair share of it. You are certainly entitled at least to the two hundred I promised any one who would restore this document. The three hundred might be considered a little private arrangement between myself and the thieves, so perhaps we may justly put the reward at the lower figure. But I don't know that it will do for me to give two such boys so large a sum at once. You can't set up in business with it now -it would be absurd; perhaps I had better invest it till you are both of age, and then give it to you with the accumulated interest — you might do something for yourselves then—or would it be better to send each of you to school for a couple of years? I really hardly know," added Mr. Garland, looking quite bewildered, "what I had better do for you"—and he turned

to Tom and Dick, as if asking them to help him out of his difficulty.

"But we didn't do it for pay—it was for fun," said Dick.

"And we wanted to serve the rascals out," added Tom; "and there isn't much mistake about our having done that."

"So we really don't want anything but the caps," said Dick; "and we shall be quite satisfied with the money for those."

"A great deal more than I shall," said Mr. Garland. "You ridiculous boys! don't you see that I can't, as an honest man, remain under such an obligation, without making some return. Go in that corner by yourselves and talk things over, while I tell Mrs. Todgers to bring you some tea and toast."

He rang the bell as he spoke and gave his directions, while Dick, whose face appeared illuminated by a sudden idea, turned to Tom, and in a low tone began pouring forth, as Mr. Garland fancied, his notions of what would be a suitable recompense. Tom's face brightened up and flushed with a strange sudden joy as Dick spoke, and presently when the two came forward Mr. Garland saw that his mouth was quivering and his eyes full of tears. Dick this time was spokesman.

"We have been thinking, sir," he said, "that —that—as you seem so uncomfortable about our not taking anything for getting that paper back, there's a way that might make matters pleasant to all parties, if-if-you liked it. Tom and I don't care to go to school again, and of course it's nonsense for us to think of setting up in business yet, but we thought that if it was all the same to you, perhaps you wouldn't mind sending little Jack instead. He's Tom's brother, sir, you know, and as I've none of my own, why Tom lets me go shares in him. And he's wonderful clever. Now, Tom and I ain't great at our books, but as to Jack !--why, if he's put in the right way, I shouldn't wonder," said Dick, warming up as he spoke, "but he'll be an archbishop at the least, or even a lawyer like your-And if the school might be someself. sir. where near, where Tom and I could go and see him of a Sunday, and take him out to church, and then home to a bit of dinner-"

And then Tom burst in with a great sob. "Oh, sir! you don't know what it would be to me to see little Jack every Sunday!"

Here the tea and toast came in, as well as a savoury dish of ham and eggs; and Mr. Garland bade the boys sit down and partake of the

good things before them. He walked up and down the room once or twice, then coming up to Dick, placed his hand on his shoulder, saying, "I like your notion, it's a good one. I'll look out for a school at once. I think I know of a good one near Highgate. We'll send little Jack there, and see what the young fellow can do for himself. Let him come up at Christmas to be with you a little time before he goes to school, and Mrs. Todgers here, who has had young folks of her own, will get him a rig out. He shall travel inside the coach. I will write to Mr. Dunstone, and settle all that. So now, my boys, get your tea, and don't affront Mrs. Todgers by not making a good one."

No need to tell them that. How those boys ate and laughed, and almost cried, and talked of little Jack, and pictured his delight when he should read Tom's letter telling him he was to come up and live near him. They almost forgot Mr. Garland's presence, they were so intensely, thoroughly happy, and he sat and watched them, sipping his wine the while, with a calm, quiet satisfaction. But when they rose to go, he put five guineas in Tom's hand. "You want the new caps, you know, and some few little things beside to make you smart enough

to take Master Jack out on Sundays. I'll answer for Mrs. Todgers turning him out a dandy of the first water. There—there—that's enough—get your new clothes, and come next Sunday and let me see how you look in them."





CHAPTER XX.

THE INN AT HOUNSLOW AGAIN—THE HIGHWAYMEN'S REAPPEARANCE—THE SQUIRE'S WARNING.

S soon as Dick and Tom had gone, Mr. Garland bethought himself of a duty he had to perform towards those worthy individuals Dogget and Jephson, and lost no time in despatching a couple of Bow-street runners to Carden-street in order to secure them. birds had flown, and Mr. Garland was disappointed in the hopes he had entertained of affording them lodgings for awhile in Newgate. had the pleasure of hearing, however, that they had suffered severely by their fall through the skylight, and that Mr. Green, their landlord, had insisted upon being recompensed for the damage they had inflicted on his property, declaring that if they did not reimburse him at once for every broken pane of glass, he would send for the constables and give them in charge for entering his workshop in such an illegal manner. The truth was, Mr. Green did not at all fancy his lodgers—they had only been in his house a week, but he had seen quite enough of them to be convinced that they were of a very different class to the hardworking folks who inhabited the rest of his house; and he was therefore very peremptory in his demands, which Messieurs Dogget and Jephson thought it best to comply with, having no wish to be brought in contact with the constables. Having satisfied Mr. Green, they went upstairs, quietly packed up their property, and watching their opportunity slipped out of the house without thinking it necessary to acquaint Mr. Green or any one in it with their departure.

A few days after this, little Jack received a letter enclosed in one to Ambrose Dunstone, acquainting him with the change in his prospects. The small one was delighted; to go to school was a great thing; Jack wished very much to be a scholar. But to go to school near Tom, and to spend his Christmas first with Dick and him, was a joy beyond Jack's wildest dreams. Ambrose Dunstone and his wife, now they were to lose the child, began to wish that the burthen which they had at first complained of had been imposed upon them a little longer. They were sorry to part with little Jack, after all. He had found a soft place in their hearts, and nestled himself

there. Mrs. Wilkins, to whom Tom also wrote, acquainting her with the good news, was very much pleased to hear that Jack was to be well provided for. She said he must come and stop a week with her, however, before he went to London; and accordingly, ten days before Christmas, Jack was brought to Bridgetown by Ambrose Dunstone, who had occasion to go there at that time, and remained with Mrs. Wilkins. He had a good time of it while at Bridgetown. Every one had heard that little Jack Dunstone was going to a grand London boarding-school; but they made things rather different to what they really were, saying that Tom had got on so well that he was making his fortune fast, and his sending Jack to school was a sure sign of it. Tom had all the credit of paying for his brother's education, and Jack's departure from Bridgetown was a perfect ovation. Mrs. General came to see him off, so did Mrs. Wilkins, Harry Swain, and a number of other boys. Jack was loaded with good things. Mrs. General sent a hamper to Tom, with some of her own ginger wine in it. a large pot of jam, a plum-cake, and some mince pies. Mrs. Wilkins sent the boys a plum-pudding, all ready made and boiled, and wanting only warming up for Christmas-day, and a leg of pork from one of her own pigs-Seth Wilkins was

now quite a farmer on a small scale, though he was constantly complaining of the loss his pigs and poultry were to him—and Harry Swain's mother forwarded a basket of apples and pears from her own garden. On the whole, not a traveller in the coach had so much luggage as little Jack; and as he did not like that more than he could help should be put away where he could not see it, he sat with his feet perched up on one hamper, a large basket on his lap, and a very small bag containing all his wardrobe by his side. His great-coat was certainly warm, but of a very peculiar description, Mrs. Ambrose having contrived it at the beginning of the winter out of an old cloak of her own; and as she wished it to last Jack for some years, and to give him plenty of room to grow in, she had made it so long that Jack could scarcely walk a step without treading on the skirts, while the sleeves quite fell over his fingers, and made it necessary for him to tuck them up whenever he had to use his hands. His cap was so small that it was constantly falling off, so Mrs. Wilkins had tied it on with an old yellow silk handkerchief of her husband's, which came over his ears and under his chin, where the ends were tucked inside a scarlet comforter of her own knitting, and Jack's little round face, with its bright eyes and small nose, just tipped

with red this frosty morning, beamed above the comforter and between the handkerchief with an intense delight and happiness that did one good to behold. He smiled and nodded at every one, and laughed aloud when the coach started off amidst the hurrahs of the boys, the good-bye of Mr. Wilkins, the waving of Mrs. General's handkerchief, and the low "God bless you, my child!" from Mrs. Wilkins. He might have felt sorry at parting with them all, but how could he when he was going to see Tom?—Tom who had sent for him, and was going to put him to school, where he should learn everything, and would come and see him and take him out every Sunday-Tom, wonderful, good, clever, brave Tom, the best big brother that ever small boy had!

Things were not going quite so well with some of the people Jack left behind him as they could have wished. Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jefferies both considered they had great reason to be dissatisfied with their brother the Squire. He had no children of his own, and positively refused to do anything for theirs, which they thought was exceedingly unjust and unkind of him. There was a school some miles off, to which at that time it was considered the correct thing for young gentlemen in the position of Gussy and Fred to be sent, at least for a year or two, to finish their

education, it standing in the same relation to the sons of the country doctors and lawyers that Eton and Harrow did to the young squirearchy. But it was expensive, and Mr. Preston's sisters thought that he ought to contribute to the expense. They had been for some time urging and begging of him to do so, but with no other effect than that of keeping him away from their houses, and his telling them that they need not come to his if they only did so as beggars. And the Squire seemed to have his own troubles. He was more gloomy and silent than ever; his poor gentle wife's awe of him redoubled, and even his sisters were beginning to feel a little afraid of him. Indeed, lately they had thought it best to desist from urging him about the school, and contented themselves with grumbling confidentially to one another. But when little Jack was borne off in triumph by the mail to a school, the importance, expensiveness, and gentility of which was magnified by the town report to something far beyond that of the establishment to which the two ladies vainly sighed to send their sons, they felt that the last drop of bitterness was added to the cup which their brother's niggardliness compelled them to drink.

As to Jack he never had such a Christmas in his life. On arriving at London the coach was

met by Dick and Tom; and Jack, springing into the arms of the latter, was kissed and hugged, and hugged and kissed back again, till it seemed as if the two brothers could never bear to part again. Then Dick came in for his share, and at last the three boys went off to their lodgings, where Dick soon prepared a glorious supper of pork-chops for them.

The next evening they went round to Mr. Garland's, and here Jack was formally introduced to Mrs. Todgers, who lifted up hands and eyes at his appearance in his great-coat, but willingly undertook the task of renewing his habiliments, if he were brought round the next day. This Tom promised to do at his dinner-hour; and accordingly a little after two Jack and Mrs. Todgers started on their shopping round; and as the things were all bought ready-made, Jack's appearance when Tom and Dick came to fetch him after work surprised them not a little. The next evening Mr. Garland took them all to the play, and they saw something which none of those boys ever forgot-Mrs. Siddons as Queen Catherine. Mr. Garland was a regular play-goer, liked his tragedy and his farce, though he did not care much for the pantomimes, and would have thought it a sheer waste of money to leave five minutes before the performance was over. Just

the sort of person to take boys to the play, one who knew the actors well and their best points. who took a good supply of oranges in his pocket. and was sure to be in capital time to secure front places in the pit. After Christmas they went, in company with Mrs. Todgers, to see the pantomime. and they had a whole day's sight-seeing before Jack left for school, when they visited the Tower, Mrs. Salmon's waxwork, and the menagerie at Exeter Change, and went home to tea with Mrs. Todgers, who was becoming quite fond of Jack, and promised to make him a large plum-cake to take with him to school. Their Christmasday they spent at home, Mr. Garland dining with some old friends, and Mrs. Todgers visiting her But they baked their beef over some potatoes-Mr. Garland had sent them a sirloin, and they warmed up the plum-pudding and mince pies, and talked over friends at Bridgetown as they sipped the ginger wine which came from Mrs. General.

A fortnight after Christmas Jack went to school, and every Sunday morning Dick and Tom went to fetch him, and take him to one church or another; then they dined, and afterwards took a walk and went to tea with Mrs. Todgers. So matters went on pleasantly enough till the days began to lengthen, and in London streets the cry

of "Primroses all a blowing" was heard. Ton bought some primroses for his window, and some more for poor Mrs. Webb; and one fine Sunday Dick and he took Jack up to Highgate church, and had a long stroll afterwards, coming home to a cold meat-pie which Dick had manufactured the preceding evening. Indeed Dick was a wonderful cook; he prepared such capital little dinners at so small an expense that the boys, now Mr. Webb had raised their wages two shillings a weck, began to fare quite sumptuously.

One day about this time, Tom was rather surprised at receiving a message from Mr. Garland, asking him to come to his house as soon as he had finished work. "What can it be for?" thought Tom; "surely nothing can be amiss with little Jack, and Mr. Garland's sent to tell me of it?"

Without waiting to tidy himself he hurried off at once, and on arriving at Mr. Garland's residence was shown, to his surprise, not as usual into the dining-room at the back of the house, but into the office, which was in the front. Here he found Mr. Garland sitting at his writing-table, and a little distance from him, in the darkest corner—the light was beginning to fade—a figure of an old sordidly-dressed man, bending forward with his hands upon his stick and his chin resting

upon them. "Was it?—could it be old Quarle?—what did he do here?—and how was it that he, Tom, was always running against him?" Mr. Garland soon satisfied him as to the identity of his visitor by saying—

"This is Tom Dunstone, Mr. Quarle."

"Yes—yes, I know him," said the old man. "A year has made a cliange, but not so great a one that I should be mistaken in him. It would take a great many years to do that, I think."

Tom looked again at Quarle. He seemed more bent and shrivelled than ever. Was it the waning light that made him think so, or had the old man really aged so much in the past year, that had only made him, Tom, stronger and stouter and sturdier than ever?

Quarle continued—

"Well, Tom, I'm your debtor again, it seems. Mr. Garland has been telling me that if it had not been for you I might have been some thousand pounds the poorer, or have waited for my rights till I was in my grave. It's a strange thing, Tom, but you're always helping me one way or the other."

"I'm sure it's not that I want to do it," said Tom, bluntly; "but it seems as if one couldn't help it somehow."

"Mr. Garland says," continued Quarle, "that

you would take nothing for yourself as a reward for the restoration of the deed——"

"Oh yes, I did," replied Tom; "Dick and I have a new suit each with the money he made us take; and then there's little Jack's schooling, Mr. Garland pays for that. I'm sure if it was a good thing Dick and I got those papers back for you, it has been a much better one for us. Jack is getting on famously; I should just like you to see his writing."

"Yes—yes, that's all very well," said Quarle.
"Mr. Garland has done his part, for it would have been a very serious thing for him as well as for me if this document had not been restored; but—but I think I ought to make you some return, Tom, for this last service you have rendered me."

"Don't see that I deserve it," replied Tom.

"It was not done out of kindness to you, sir, not so much even as when I got the dog out of the well. There he is, poor fellow!—Shock, old boy, don't you know me?"

It seemed as if Shock did, for he came up to Tom, rubbed his coat, which was almost as shabby a one as his master's, against Tom's legs, and licked his hand.

"No, Tom, I suppose it was not," said Quarle, sadly; "and it will be no use asking you to take

anything in the way of money for what you hav done. But I think there's one thing you migh accept even from me."

And with a strange, almost pitiful, humility the old man took a piece of paper out of his well worn pocket-book, and offered it to Tom, who glanced over the writing, flushed—turned pale—trembled—and then said—

"I think; yes, I do think, sir, that I'll take this I have done something for it. It's a good beginning. There's one cleared off at any rate."

The paper was a discharge in full of the debt and interest due from the late Reuben Dunstone yeoman, of Boreham, to Jacob Quarle of Bridge town, in consideration of certain valuable services rendered by Thomas Dunstone to the aforesaic Jacob Quarle.

"Yes, Tom, there's one cleared off," said Mr Garland; "and let me tell you the services you have rendered to Mr. Quarle from time to time fully entitle you to this reward. You have fairly earned the right to say that you have discharged one debt of your father's."

"With Dick's help," said Tom, like an honest fellow as he was.

"Well, yes, in this last transaction; but remember, it is by no means the only one in which you have benefited Mr. Quarle without Dick's

assistance, or almost in spite of him. Dick is a good lad, and has told me the whole story of his prejudices against Mr. Quarle, and the manful way in which you combated them. And now, good-bye, my lad, we wont keep you any longer, as Mr. Quarle and I have still some business to settle."

Tom went home and showed Dick his precious paper, which, in spite of what Mr. Garland had said, he thought he owed almost as much to his friend as himself. But Dick would not allow that at all. "I should have left the old fellow's dog in the well till now," he said; "and when he was ill, I never could have gone into the house alone to look after him. And as to this deed we got back from the thieves, if you hadn't scared them away from Mr. Garland by shamming ghost, he'd never have lived to have told us he'd lost it. Another five minutes, and they'd have settled him. No, Tom, it's all your doing—clearing off this debt of your father's. You've paid it yourself, every penny of it."

So Tom laid down his head on his pillow that night with a deep calm sense of thankfulness that so far he had cleared his father's name. One debt at least was rubbed off; with God's blessing every one of the others should be paid too.

The next morning Dick and he had a letter from the mistress, which gave them something to think and talk of all day. She told them Mr. Quarle had left his house, and gone, it was thought, to London; Squire Preston seemed getting worse than ever, the last time he came to the town he looked so ill and altered that she scarcely knew him, and strange stories, but these might be only gossip, were spread about him. Some said that he had been speculating, and lost a great deal of money; others, that he had for years been living beyond his income; but the Squire was a careful man, and his wife had brought him money, so that though everything had been in very good style, still she thought he could not have been spending more than he ought. However that might be, there were no horses kept now at Preston-hope but the Squire's own roadster, and two of the servants had been sent away. It was said, too, that he talked of coming to London, so very likely Tom would run against him, and then he would see for himself how changed and altered his uncle was.

"Why don't she say the Squire?" said Tom, crossly; "he's no uncle of mine. I suppose he's been doing as my poor father did,—sinking money in his land that he'll never get back

again. Who knows, the Squire may be as badly off as he was, one day."

"Worse, perhaps," said Dick; "for he'll leave no son behind him to pay his debts. I wonder if he owes money to old Quarle."

Dick's guess was pretty near the truth. Mr. Preston was very deeply indeed in debt to Quarle, having borrowed money on the security of his estate, and the time for repayment had fallen only a week after Mr. Garland had been robbed on Hounslow Heath of the mortgage deed. He had been obliged to write at once to his client stating the loss, and as it was not easy to foreclose the mortgage while the deed was missing, Mr. Preston had had a few months' grace given him. But as soon as Mr. Quarle learned that the mortgage deed was safe, he sent peremptory instructions to Mr. Garland to insist upon Mr. Preston either repaying the loan at once or surrendering his estate, every acre of which, along with the dwelling-house, had been pledged for years. Mr. Preston had indeed been doing much as Tom's father had done, endeavouring to improve his lands in the hope that after awhile they would repay him tenfold. He had been trying to obtain money on the strength of his wife's income, but it was not easy to do so, as it was settled on herself, and the poor lady was unable

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to help him, although she would gladly have parted with every penny to have pleased him; but she could give him no more than the interest of the money belonging to her, as the principal was tied up beyond even her own control. But the Squire in his desperation thought that something might be done for him in his need if his wife's trustees could only be prevailed on to let her have the control of her own property, so he had resolved to come to London, see them, explain matters, and try if they would not permit his wife to assist him, when they learned how needful it was, even for her own sake, that she should do so. This was the object of his intended journey to London, and it was to bring matters to a crisis, and suffer Mr. Garland to waste no time in delays, that Quarle had come to London.

The old man was as pitiless to Tom's uncle as he had been to his father. Mr. Garland ventured to remonstrate, but it was useless. Quarle was bent, if possible, upon having the estate, and all the delays which Mr. Preston had recourse to chafed him terribly. He did not want the money, he told Mr. Garland, but he did want the estate, and he was angry with that gentleman whenever he pleaded in Mr. Preston's behalf, and pestered him day after day to know

how things were going on, and whether the law for once could not be induced to move a little faster, and let him come into his own. seemed possessed with a nervous dread lest by any means the Squire should obtain the money even at the eleventh hour, and prevent his entering on the estate.

This was the state of things when one evening, just as Dick and Tom were going home, Mr. Webb informed them that they must go out of town for a job to-morrow. It was an old acquaintance of his, the master of the Bell, near Hounslow, who wanted him to do some house repairs for him. They were nothing more than the two boys could undertake, simple, straightforward work enough, and he might run down one day himself and see after them. Slight, the master of the Bell, had come to town that day and informed him that he meant to give him the job, as there was not a carpenter near who could be trusted in an inn. "Drunken rascals, every one of them," said Mr. Webb, who was half tipsy himself, having been amusing himself the whole afternoon with his acquaintance in the parlour of a public-house hard by. "Can't be trusted to work in an inn, and know nothing of their business if they could. That's why Slight wants me to undertake it—he knows what I am; yesyes—Slight knows me—knows me about as well as you do, boys."

Tom and Dick thought that if that was true, it did not reflect much credit on Mr. Slight's judgment that he should have selected Mr. Webb to do his work. But however, they were very glad of the chance of going in the country, and as they were to lodge at the inn, their own housekeeping would be somewhat lightened, and they should have a pleasant change from the dull, dirty workshop and the close London streets.

Mr. Slight was to return to Hounslow the next day, and would call for the boys at Mr. Webb's before nine the next morning. Tom and Dick remembered him well enough when they saw him. He was a short, stout, rosy-faced man, looking every inch an innkeeper. drove a capital horse, and as he was very chatty and good-humoured, the boys enjoyed the drive through the fresh country air very much. They reached the Bell about half-past ten, and then began work at once. They found what they were required to do was to mend the flooring in several of the rooms; replace some of the balusters that had broken away; and fit up a cupboard or two with shelves, for all of which they had brought plenty of material with them. They were easy jobs, and the boys had no

fear but that they should be able to manage them very well without Mr. Webb's superintendence. "Much better without than with," said Dick: "and I only hope he'll have the sense to keep away and let us get on by ourselves."

When work was over for the day, they ran out down the green lanes near the Bell. The light was waning, but there was still sufficient for them to see the tender greenness of the budding hedges, and to rejoice in the clear, soft light of the sky. They found some primroses, too-what old friends the simple flowers were, and they heard the birds twittering their evening song—it was altogether such a treat as they had not had since they left Bridgetown, and they enjoyed it in a manner that they would never have done had it not been for living in London, which had taught them more than anything else could how to appreciate the country.

They were kindly treated by the mistress of the inn—a comfortable woman, with three small children of her own. She gave them a snug little room to sleep in, and they had every reason to be satisfied with the fare provided for them. "It will spoil us for going home," said Dick. "Our money will never reach to bacon for breakfast, and hot roasts and pudding for dinner.

Never mind, let's make the best of it while we've got it, and hope that we shall get some more such jobs as this before the summer's out."

Two days after their arrival at the Bell, they began working in the tap-room. Here they found they had a great deal to do, a long piece of the flooring at the furthest end from the fireplace being quite wormeaten and rotten. There was no other place in the inn that could be used as a tap-room, so the few labourers who dropped in in the course of the day, drank their beer and watched the boys at their work, submitting with a tolerable grace to their own boisterous talk being drowned in the noise of the saw and the hammer. About four o'clock in the afternoon Mrs. Slight came into the tap-room looking vexed and annoyed. There was no one in it now but Tom and Dick, and when she observed this, she appeared still more disconcerted.

"I thought I might have found some one here who could see to a horse," she said. "Slight's out, and John Ostler has been and got dead drunk, and a gentleman's just rode up and wants his horse seen to while he has some dinner. He's gone into the parlour now, and Betty's holding the horse; but however will she be able to rub it down or give it its food? and there's no one here to do as much for me."

"Oh yes, there is," said Dick, cheerfully. "Tom and I understand horses quite as well as your John Ostler. We'll go and see to him directly."

"Are you sure you do?" said Mrs. Slight, doubtfully.

Tom laughed. "My father kept six horses in his stables, missus, and I rode on them bare-backed almost before I could walk; don't be afraid. Your customer must be hard to please if he finds much fault with either our grooming or feeding his horse."

Mrs. Slight felt reassured, and telling the boys where they would find the horse and fodder and corn for him, went to see what dinner she could most quickly send in, the gentleman having urged her to be quick, as he wished to reach London that night. Betty was very glad to be released from the horse, and ran in to help her mistress, telling the boys that they would find John Ostler stretched in the stable, drunk, and that when they had seen to the horse, if they had a pail of water to spare, they had better bestow it upon him. "That'll sober him, perhaps," she said; "a nasty, dirty, tipsy brute. I hope you wont leave a dry thread on him."

Then she flounced into the house, and the

boys led the horse into the stable. He was tall, strong, black, and evidently capable of doing a good day's work. But he seemed to have had rather more put upon him the last day or two than he was capable of performing, appearing quite tired out. Tom looked at him curiously. "I never saw a horse so like Squire Preston's black that he always rode, in my life. Did you, Dick?"

"Well, he is like," said Dick. "I remember the old fellow well. He was the best horse in our part. I often wished I'd the riding of him instead of the Squire. But this can't be him, you know. What should Squire Preston do in this part of the world?"

"Mrs. Wilkins said he was coming to London," said Tom, "and as likely as not he'd ride instead of going by coach. Why, he went to Exeter one day on Wallack, and came back the next—fifty miles each way, you know—but Wallack looked none the worse for it the day after he came back. If this is him, he's got a scar on his left leg; he stumbled once and cut himself. He never went any the worse for it, but the mark wouldn't go. It's hereabouts, if it's here at all. Yes!—this is Wallack, sure enough." And Tom pointed out to Dick a small scar half hidden by the hair on the horse's leg,

three inches above the foot. "I remember when he did it. Wallack, old fellow, who would have thought of seeing you?"

Tom stroked and caressed the horse; he was very fond of animals, and it was not Wallack's fault that he belonged to Squire Preston. Then he led him to the stable, where Dick and he attended to his wants; then they left him, Tom observing, "It's to be hoped his master don't mean to go any further to-night; Wallack's pretty nigh done up."

They went back to the tap-room with the intention of continuing their work, but on arriving there they found two men sitting by the fire smoking and drinking beer. Their hats were pulled over their faces, and the collars of their coats drawn up, and even if the boys had been curious enough to want to see more of them, it would not have been easy to do so, as they sat with their backs to the door. But Tom and Dick had something else to do than to stare at strangers, so without giving the men another thought, they went on with their work, over which they did not make the noise they had done in the earlier part of the day, as they were now fixing the wood in its place, consequently they could hear all that the men said if they chose to talk, which they soon did, and the first observation which one of

them made, though a very simple one, nearly caused Tom to drop the wood he was holding from his hand. He recognised the voice, and so did Dick, and the two boys glanced furtively at each other, and tried to look, without being observed, at the two men, who continued their conversation, which, if the oaths with which it was interlarded had been left out, would have been harmless enough, as it principally turned on the merits of the beer and tobacco which they were consuming. There was no doubt of it—the strangers were Dogget and Jephson, and Tom felt that it would be very desirable for the parish constables to be acquainted with the character of Mr. Slight's guests. The best thing. of course, seemed to be to tell Mr. Slight first, but then he was out, and it hardly seemed a fit matter to trouble Mrs. Slight with. While Tom was hesitating he heard the landlord's voice, and glancing at Dick, said-

"There's the master come home; let's go and ask him if it isn't time we left off work."

The two thieves glanced sharply at them as they passed. Their last recollections of carpenter's boys were not pleasant ones, but then they had not seen the faces of the lads who had outwitted them, and it was not very likely that these would be the same, so they drew closer to the fire and made use of the opportunity afforded them of being alone by talking quietly together over the best way of turning the coming night to profitable account.

Meanwhile Tom and Dick found Mr. Slight, and acquainted him with the character of the men in his tap-room. But the landlord was not disposed to take any active measures in the He liked to have a quiet house, and, as matter. he sometimes said. "It took all sorts of customers to keep a public going," and if two gentlemen of the road were captured in his house, it might entail unpleasant consequences on himself, besides keeping customers away, who if they might not be of the highest character, at any rate drank freely and paid well for all they had. So he contented himself with telling the boys he thought they must be mistaken; rascals like that would never come to his house: and then going to the tap-room, gave the men a broad hint that he should be more glad of their room than their company. Dogget and Jephson were not slow in taking it, and five minutes after, when Tom and Dick went to the side door, they saw them slinking off. They ran to the landlord and indignantly told him that the thieves had gone.

"And a good thing too if they have," said

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Mr. Slight. "Tisn't likely they're what you take them to be; and a pretty thing it would be for my house for the constables to come here hauling honest men off to the lock-up. And if you are right," he added, lowering his voice, "why, it's a better thing still. The constables—and there's only two of them—are half a mile off, and fellows of the sort you say these are have always loaded pistols about them, and ain't nice about using them neither; and a pretty thing it would be for me to be killed in helping the constables, and my missus frighted to death. No, let well alone, boys—let well alone; and get through the world as quietly as you can. So now come in; and let's ask the missus to give us some tea."

But they had to wait for tea, for Mrs. Slight had not yet finished cooking the lamb-chops and spinach which were to form Mr. Preston's dinner. As soon as she had done so, and sent them in, she made the tea, while Tom, as usual, toasted the bread, which Dick afterwards buttered. There was a splendid pile of hot crisp brown toast soon made, to which both Tom and Dick did ample justice, although they were by no means satisfied with Mr. Slight's advice. They made up their minds not to go out that evening. I think that by this I need hardly say that Tom and Dick were as brave as most boys, but they had no wish

to be shot at from behind a hedge, which might have been their fate had the thieves recognised them. They would have been ready enough to help the constables, but there was no use in running into needless danger, where, as Dick expressed it, "The hitting would be all on one side, and that not ours." So they resolved to stop quietly at home, or, at any rate, not to venture further than the garden.

Soon after they had finished their tea, Betty brought in word that the gentleman in the parlour wanted a pint of port, and would like his horse got ready in half an hour's time, as he wished to reach London early.

"Go to London on that horse!" cried Dick, "what a shame! The poor brute's done up already. He'll break down before he's halfway there."

But Tom thought of other mishaps befalling the Squire than his horse failing him. There was a dark, lonely bit of road between the Bell and Hounslow, and Dogget and Jephson were not likely to be loitering in the neighbourhood for any good purpose. The Squire had been no friend to him, but he was his mother's brother, and had he not been, it was his duty to warn him of the dangers in his way. He slipped quietly out of the kitchen, and tapping at the door of the

parlour where the Squire had dined, heard him say, "Come in."

Tom entered, and was startled to see the change that a year had wrought in the Squire. He looked an old man, thin, anxious, and careworn, with lines round his mouth and on his forehead that had not been there when Tom last saw him. The boy felt sorry for him. There was a little hardness in Tom's nature—remember, he had been very hardly dealt with, but it always melted at the first touch of pity, and he felt very pitiful for the Squire now. He said respectfully—

"I think, sir, it's as well you should know that the road from here to London isn't a very good one. I know there are some bad fellows about; two of them have been drinking here to-night. You'll do better to stop here, and start early in the morning."

"Who has sent you to me with that story?" said the Squire. "I suppose the landlord wants me to pay for bed and breakfast as well as dinner; but—eh!—is that you, Tom Dunstone? Have you turned waiter at an inn, sir?"

"If I had, it would not have been through anything that you would have done to have prevented it," replied Tom; "but that's nothing to do with the matter. I tell you, sir, it is not safe

for you to ride this road to-night. Your horse is knocked up, and if you fell in with bad company you couldn't outstrip them, and it's a dark, dangerous bit from here to Hounslow. Indeed, indeed, you'd better be guided by me, sir."

"I'll take my chance," said the Squire. "I've pistols with me, and know how to use them. But I thank you for the caution. I suppose you mean well, unless it's done to swell the landlord's bill."

"I'm not in his employ," answered Tom. "I'm working at the trade the parish 'prenticed me to at Bridgetown, and am only here on a job. Well, sir, good night; but I hope you'll think better of what I've said."

"Not I," said the Squire; "but, good night," and he turned away, muttering, as he looked in the fire, "I never saw the fellow look so like his mother. Hang it! why did she throw herself away on a farmer?"

The Squire sat brooding by the fire for some time longer, so that it was nearly eight before he rang to ask for his bill and to know if his horse was ready. Mr. Slight presented the bill himself, and did his best to induce the Squire to stay, remarking on the tired state of his horse and the danger of the roads in that part after dark. But the Squire only laughed. "You're all in the same

story," he said. "Get me my horse, and let be gone."

Mr. Slight had to saddle the horse with his o hands, Tom and Dick refusing to have anyth to do with him. "They would have nothing do," they said, "with helping the Squire on his end, and they felt if he fell in with those r cals they had seen in the tap-room, to his end would surely come."

The Squire rode away, and Dick and To gathered with the rest around the kitchen fi The tap-room was full of labourers from t neighbouring cottages, and the sound of the boisterous merriment reached the kitchen. The were no guests in the parlour; and in spite the cheery blaze and Mr. Slight's jokes, his wife pleasant gossip and the fun and antics of t children, with whom the boys had already ma fast friends, Tom felt a dull, heavy presentime of evil weighing his spirits down. Had the Squi gone to his doom? If he fell in with those vi men it would be a dark one; for he was a bray determined man, and would fight it out to the last; and then Tom remembered how he ha heard his mother tell of a great-uncle of hers wl had been shot down by highwaymen a few yar from his own home, because he would yie neither purse nor watch. Was something lil

this to be the Squire's fate, only instead of being overtaken by a sudden death near his home, was he to perish more than a hundred miles away from wife and household?

So Tom sat silent and still, till Dick began to yawn and stretch, and ask if he did not think it time they went to bed. Then Tom rose, and lighting his candle was about to go upstairs when a sound reached his ears, and those of all in the house but the sleeping children, and made them thrill with terror.

It was the neigh of a horse; but never before had those on whose ears it sounded now, heard such a cry from an animal. It was full of terror and agony, like a wild, wailing appeal for help in utter need. Tom trembled as he heard it; then he said, "I know it's Wallack; Mr. Slight, let's be quick and see to him. I believe he's come to tell us that his master's murdered!"

They all hurried to the front of the house, from which the sound appeared to come. The labourers from the tap-room stood in the passage, half afraid to venture out till they saw Mr. Slight coming. Then they followed him outside the house, where stood Wallack, his eyes dilating, his mouth foaming, and his head thrown wildly back, as he prepared to emit another neigh.

Tom went up to the poor creature, and strok and soothed him. "Where is he, Wallack—whis he?—good horse—take me him."

But Wallack stood terrified and afraid to mo and then Tom said, "We must go on the Lond road till we find Mr. Preston. That was the w he took. He can't have travelled far with horse so tired as his was."

"Better take a shutter with us," said one the men to the others. "He'll not be able walk home."

It was bright, clear moonlight, and Tom so that Wallack's saddle was displaced, and one the stirrups torn quite off. He pointed it out Dick. "There's been a sharp tussle."

"Sure to be. He'd be safe to show fight said Dick, as the little procession moved off dow the London road. They walked on for above mile, and then they heard groans as from one deadly pain, and it was not long before the found from whom they came. There, by the road side, lay the Squire, his dress torn and blood and the clear moonlight showing fearful bruiss on his face. Near him lay something much stiller than the Squire; something that would never do deeds of violence again, or sin a blaspheme more. Something so quiet the

the men instinctively felt there was no need to concern themselves about *that*, be it who it might, while the one living man claimed their care.

They placed him on the shutter as tenderly and gently as they could, and Dick volunteering to run on to Hounslow for a doctor, they carried the Squire slowly back to the Bell, Tom walking by his side, feeling that now on him devolved the charge of his kinsman, and the duty of avenging him. "Though," said Tom, setting his teeth with a grim satisfaction, "he's pretty well done that for himself; but it'll go hard if I don't catch the other, and hang him for this night's work."

They laid the Squire upon a bed in the very room where Mr. Garland had slept. It was not long before the doctor came, but when he did he pronounced the case hopeless. A few hours, and all would be over.

The Squire seemed to know as much, for looking at the doctor, he said—

"It's all up, I suppose?"

He had no answer, so he said softly-

"How long first?"

"Not many hours," was the reply given at last.

"Too late, then, to do anything—to do any-

thing for the old house and lands," moaned the Squire, and then his eyes fell on Tom, who stoom at the foot of the bed, looking very sorrowfully upon him. A light came into the Squire's face and Tom heard him murmur—

"They may be his, after all. The old mar always liked him. I'd rather so than the others He's a brave fellow, and a Preston too by the mother's side."

Then the Squire fell into a doze, but Tor kept watch by him. Dick had gone to lie down for a few hours, and Tom had agreed to call him at three o'clock, in order that he might walk over to Isleworth, and ride to London in one of the market carts, by which means he would be able to call on Mr. Garland some hours sooner than if he waited for the coach. The two boys thought it best that he should know how things were with the Squire. He appeared to have some knowledge of him, and might advise them as to what should be done in this emergency; at any rate they knew not to whom else they could apply.

In about an hour the Squire woke; he seemed to have a wish to speak, and Tom gave him the medicine which the doctor had left. It gave him a little strength, and he said—

"I think I shot one dead, didn't I, Tom?"

Tom nodded. He respected the Squire for that. He had fought hard for his life, and met his death as a brave man should.

"I think I must have lamed the other," said the Squire. "My ball went in his thigh, and I saw him go limping away just as the other closed in with me."

"Then he can't be far off," said Tom; "I'll send the constables after him."

But the magistrate who had been hastily summoned to take the dying man's deposition now arrived, and so Tom found some of his responsibility lightened. The Squire told his story very feebly. The two rascals had been lying, as he fancied, by a hedge, but when he got near they sprang up and began begging for alms. He rode on without paying any attention to them, till one seized his horse's bridle, and the other presented a pistol at his head. He struck the weapon down, and fired at the fellow who held it, but as he ran off the ball, he thought, could only have pierced his thigh. Then the other sprang upon him-pistol in one hand, bludgeon in the other. They had a fight for it—he was shot and dragged off his saddle. But even as he fell, he contrived to pull out his other pistol and discharge it in the villain's head. Then he

knew no more till he found himself here in this place.

The magistrate soon despatched constables to search for the wounded thief, and it was not long before they found him, and brought him to the Bell, where the Squire identified him as one of his assailants. Then he seemed very tired, and was left again with only Tom to watch him. Only Tom—of all his kin, none to be with him but the boy whom he had scouted and despised.

Towards morning he opened his eyes again.

"Are you there, Tom?"

"Yes, sir; what is it?" said Tom, coming towards him.

"Tom, I hope you'll be Preston of Prest-hope when I'm gone. I've dealt hardly by you, and you were my sister's son; but you're a better lad and a braver than either Fred or Gus. The old place wants a man for its master, and there's the making of one in you. Give me your hand. Good night, my boy."

Never a word spoke the Squire more that was audible to any ears but those of One unseen. Something he murmured between whiles, but Tom could not catch its meaning. It might be prayer—Tom hoped so; and he bent his own head and prayed too, that the offences and short-

comings of the dying man might be forgiven above, as heartily as he, Tom, forgave those he had committed against him. So another hour passed on, and as the sun rose Squire Preston gave a great sigh, and closed his eyes never to open them in this world again.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE JOURNEY BACK TO BRIDGETOWN—JACK OFFERS TO PROTECT HIS UNCLES—MR. TOZER PROVIDES THE LAWYER AND THE DOCTOR WITH A LODGING.

HE Squire was quietly buried in a corner of Hounslow churchyard. Mr. Garland directed everything, and Tom and he attended the funeral together. He wrote to Mrs. Preston acquainting her with her bereavement as tenderly and gently as he could, but he soon had to let her know that her husband's death was not the only loss that had befallen her. Then for the first time she became aware how deeply the Squire had become involved. Something of his embarrassments he had been obliged to tell her. in order to obtain her consent to her trustees allowing him to make use of her money, but she had not thought the ruin so thorough as it really was. The very stock on the farm and the household furniture had been pledged to Quarle as additional security for the money he had advanced. She bore it very placidly, however. Her own income was sufficient for her wants, which were very simple, and leaving the Grange she took up her quarters at Bridgetown, where Mrs. General Mauriel took her under her wing, and announced that after herself Mrs. Preston was the lady of the most social importance in the town. There was no disputing Mrs. General's fiat in such matters, and Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown had to give place accordingly to their sister-in-law, and Mrs. General took very good care they did; although Mrs. Preston herself would have cared very little about the matter.

But they had a much greater mortification to endure, than learning that as soon as their sister-in-law was able to join in them they would have to give place and precedence to her at all the tea drinkings and card-parties in the town. There was no hiding from any one that Squire Preston had died deeply in debt, and that neither Fred Jefferies nor Gussy Brown would ever be the Squire of Prest-hope in his place. Jacob Quarle had taken possession of the Grange, that is to say, though he did not live there himself he had put people in to take charge of the house and furniture; had let the home farm, and collected the rents himself. No chance of Fred or Gussy ever reigning at Prest-hope now, and as there

was no longer a squire in the family, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jefferies felt their social importance greatly diminished.

Tom and Dick went on much as before at Mr. Webb's. He had raised their wages again, so that things were more comfortable than they had been. Every Sunday they went out with Jack, and when the Midsummer holidays came it was arranged that he should spend them with Mrs. Todgers, and that they should come to see or take him out every evening. Mr. Garland showed an increasing interest in the boys; he lent them books, and persuaded them to go to evening school, and Tom tried hard to learn all he could, so that when little Jack grew up he might not be ashamed of his brother.

"It wont do for one to be a dunce, and the other a scholar," he said to Dick; "and I shouldn't like Peculiar to be ashamed of me by and by. Not that ever I shall be up to his mark; still there's no reason," he added, laughing, "that I should be as great a disgrace to him as I've been to the rest of my family."

Dick tried hard to study too, in order to "keep up a bit with Tom;" and so with work and lessons, and visiting Mr. Garland, and taking care of little Jack, some months passed on pleasantly enough.

I should have mentioned sooner that Mr. Jephson suffered the penalty of his misdeeds on the gallows, to the satisfaction of every one who was acquainted with his past career. Those were terrible hanging times, but Jephson at least deserved his doom.

In the autumn Tom was very much surprised at receiving a letter from Mrs. Preston. It was very kindly written, telling him she should be glad to hear that he was doing well, and that if he would like to come to Bridgetown to see his old master, she would willingly pay his fare by coach there and back, as well as Jack's and the friend who had gone with him.

"It's a very handsome offer, and does her credit," said Dick, "and I don't see why we shouldn't go, only I think it would be better, Tom, if we went at Christmas."

Tom too felt tempted to avail himself of Mrs. Preston's kindness, but like Dick he thought it would be better to do so at Christmas-time, when Jack would have his holidays. So he wrote back, thanking his aunt for her consideration, and telling her that he was doing very well indeed, and that Jack, Dick, and he would be very happy to avail themselves of her liberality at Christmas, it that would be equally agreeable to her. Shortly after he had another letter from Mrs. Preston,

saying that she should be very pleased to se them at Christmas, and accompanying the lette was a parcel of nicely knitted socks for little Jack. Mrs. Preston was a famous knitter, and i quite rejoiced her heart to have nephews to worl for. The boys were to spend their Christma with their old master. That had been settled from the first; and it was hearing Mrs. Wilking lament the expense of the journey, which might prevent their coming to see her for years, that had suggested to Mrs. Preston a way by which she could greatly please the boys and their old master and mistress at the same time.

This was something to look forward to. There was a little difficulty in inducing Mr. Webb to give them a holiday; but as by this time he knew that such boys were not to be met with every day, he was at last induced to agree to do so. Of course their wages would be stopped while they were away; but then, as they were very careful and would not be at much expense, they "could stand that," as Dick said; so altogether everything looked hopeful and promising for the coming Christmas-time.

But things looked more promising than ever when, a few days before Christmas, Mr. Garland informed Tom and Dick that he intended to be their fellow-traveller on the journey, as Mr. Quarle wished him to visit Bridgetown upon some business matters connected with himself.

"There are plenty of men who would serve his turn much nearer," he said, laughing, "and do his work much cheaper than I possibly can, going all the way from London for that purpose. I've told him so, but he says that's his affair—honesty's a scarce article, and if he chooses to pay for it he's a right to. It's a compliment to me, of course; and a trip in the country, even at this time of the year, is always pleasant; and as I've no particular engagement this Christmas, why, I'll spend it at Bridgetown, though I don't suppose my client will ask me to dinner."

This was delightful! Fancy travelling with Mr. Garland, who was so full of pleasant sayings and good stories! How thankful the boys felt to Mr. Quarle for selecting a London solicitor to do his business. It was a strange whim and an expensive one, but you may be sure they were in no humour to find fault with it.

It was a bitter winter, and the journey was a cold one, but our boys were too pleased with everything to grumble at the weather. They rode inside, Mrs. Preston had insisted upon that, which was a very good thing every way, as they would not have seen much of Mr. Garland else, for he certainly would not have travelled outside

the coach. Whenever they stopped to change horses they got out and ran about awhile to warm themselves; then they got in again, all glowing and fresh with the exercise, and were whirled on towards their journey's end; every mile bringing them nearer and nearer the old familiar town and the friendly faces that were waiting them. It was a hard frost, but the horses spun along the iron-bound road as if enjoying the cold, and everything went well, without any hindrance or misadventure, till they stopped at Sleigh, the last place where they changed horses before arriving at Bridgetown.

Several of their fellow-passengers alighted here, and a voice that sounded familiar to their ears said, "Room for two inside?" and on ascertaining that there was, the "two" got in. They were both gentlemen; well wrapped up, but shivering with cold. They nestled themselves into the vacant places in the carriage, and Tom and Dick were not long in doubt as to who their fellow-travellers were. They were Dr. Jefferies and Mr. Brown, who had both been to Sleigh upon business—a wine merchant's stock having been sold off that day on account of his retiring from business, and as it was necessary that both the lawyer and the doctor should occasionally purchase wine, and still more necessary that they

should do so cheaply, they had driven over in Dr. Jefferies' phaeton, but on reaching the town it was discovered that one of the shafts was in such a state that it would be impossible to return till it was mended. It was impossible for the doctor to wait; it was now nearly seven o'clock, and he had a patient seriously ill—at least ill enough in the doctor's opinion to require two visits a day whom he ought to call upon that evening, and it would take some hours to repair the damage to the phaeton, and neither Mr. Brown nor he felt at all disposed to travel alone when midnight was drawing on. In this dilemma they thought of the coach, and thus it was that they found themselves travelling in the same conveyance as their nephews.

They were not aware that they were doing so, however, for some time, when at last little Jack, who had been asleep, woke up with a start, saying, "I say, Tom, how long will it be before we are at Bridgetown?"

"Only about half an hour, my little man," said Mr. Brown, blandly, without the slightest idea that he was wasting his courtesy on his youngest nephew; but Jack's sharp ears recognised the voice at once, and sitting bolt upright, he said, "I do believe it's Uncle Brown!"

Then Mr. Brown remembered that he had

heard that Jack and Tom were to visit Bridge town that Christmas, but he had not expected to find them travelling inside the stage-coach. Mrs Preston might surely have been satisfied with paying outside fare for them. He made the best of things, however, and asked Tom how he was getting on in London, in a stiff, patronizing man ner, to which Tom replied very briefly. was very little said after that. Both Dr. Jefferie and Mr. Brown would much rather not have me the boys, who on their side could very well have dispensed with the honour of their uncles' company; so they travelled in silence till within two miles of Bridgetown, when a sudden jerk and a stop told them that something serious had happened.

"Can't be waylaid by highwaymen again!" asked Dr. Jefferies, in a nervous voice. His fears were always ready to get uppermost in his not very strong mind.

"No—no—the road's been quiet enough now for some time," said Mr. Brown, who was just a little, and a very little, braver than his brotherin-law. Presently the guard came to the door of the coach, and informed those inside that one of the horses had fallen down and lamed himself, and that he would have to go to Bridgetown for assistance; would the gentlemen wait where they were, or walk on to the town? If they were in a hurry to reach their journey's end and did not mind walking, that would be the quickest way.

So Mr. Garland seemed to think, for he got out, telling the guard to leave his luggage and that of his companions at the Blue Boar, where the coach stopped, and where he meant to take up his quarters. Dick and Tom followed, but little Jack paused at the door of the coach, and turning to the doctor, observed—

"I say, Uncle Jefferies, if you and Uncle Brown are afraid, come along with us; we'll take care of you."

This was very considerate of Jack, but his uncles did not vouchsafe him any answer. When they were alone, however, they began to consider what had best be done. They did not like the walk over the lonely road to Bridgetown, especially as they should have to pass Keyhole Freehold, which was in as bad repute as ever; but they still less liked the idea of sitting where they were, with only the coachman for protection, for there were no outside passengers, and the guard had gone on to Bridgetown; besides which the doctor would be too late for his patient, and Mr. Brown for a small card party, at which his wife was presiding that evening. So they resolved to

get out and walk, and make the best of their way to the town on foot.

But the best was a poor one. Mr. Brown was afflicted with a corn, a corn that was a perpetual trouble to him, and this night was shooting forth more vigorously than ever; he couldn't take three steps without a twinge, and before long began to regret having attempted to walk. Jack and his party were quite out of sight by this time, and Dr. Jefferies was beginning to wish that either he had not got out of the coach, or that Mr. Brown could have kept up with the rest of the passengers. It would have been worth while to have endured even Jack's tongue, to have had such an escort as those two great boys and the tall portly gentleman who was with them.

"Shall we go back to the coach?" he said to Mr. Brown.

"No—no; we've left it some way behind now. As we've got so far we'll try and push on. My good man, I've got nothing for you. Never carry my purse after dark, and don't suppose I've a copper about me."

This latter part of his speech was addressed to a tall, sturdy beggar, who seemed, as it were, to spring out of the hedge for the purpose of demanding alms with a pertinacity that would take no denial. The two gentlemen thought of the

Squire's fate, and trembled as the vagrant kept following them, clamouring for relief. His voice, too, was one that had very unpleasant recollections for Dr. Jefferies, and as the moonlight shone upon his face he recognised, with a thrill of horror, Tozer, the husband of his most refractory patient. Tozer recollected him, too, and saw that the doctor was afraid of him. He had only left prison some months ago, but instead of returning home to his affectionate wife, he had been wandering about the country making out a living as best he could by tinkering, poaching, helping in stable-yards, holding horses, and doing any other odd job that came in his way. Indeed, it is doubtful if Mr. Tozer would have cared to return home at all, this nomadic life being very well suited to his taste, had not the severity of the weather and sundry twinges of rheumatism made him think that he would do best to return to his own fireside. Mrs. Tozer had heard of his wanderings, and naturally resented her liege lord's indifference to the attractions of his home. She had got on pretty well without him by taking in a lodger or two, telling fortunes to servant girls, and allowing her house to be a hiding-place for game and poultry without troubling herself to inquire too curiously from whose preserves or fowl-house they came. On the whole she did so well without Tozer, that she had lately announced her intention of not receiving him back when he came.

"Th' house is mine, an' I ha' gotten the key," she told her intimates, "an' whosoever it be that has the key has the right to th' house. That's the law of Keyhole Freehold, an' I mean to bide by it, an' keep my place to myself without troubling Tozer, as he's let me do it so long."

All unconscious of these amiable intentions on the part of his wife, Mr. Tozer was proceeding home, accompanied by his friend Mr. Tuck, whom he had hospitably invited to spend his Christmas with him. They had taken a short cut across the fields, and on reaching the hedge and perceiving two foot passengers, Mr. Tozer thought it not unlikely that if he were sufficiently importunate they might fee him handsomely in order to be rid of him. Mr. Tuck was stopping behind to take a stone out of his boot, but Mr. Tozer had quite sufficient reliance on his own powers of persuasion or intimidation, especially when he found he had to deal with the doctor and Mr. Brown.

He had by no means forgiven them his imprisonment; he had got into trouble through being concerned with some others in an attempted burglary. This was very unjust,

as neither the doctor nor the lawyer had anything to do with it; but like many other people, Mr. Tozer did not pause to consider justice when he was angry; and he thought that Mr. Brown might have taken up his case gratuitously, and won him a triumphant acquittal; or that the doctor, who had known him so long and supplied his wife with such quantities of physic, might have come forward as a witness to character.

"Didn't they both know me?" he would say, "from the time we was all boys together. Many's the time I've snowballed that doctor, an' made him run afore me. He was allers a weak, timorsome chap, an' frighted if a mouse only wagged its tail. I blacked his eye once with a brickbat, an' it was nigh a year afterwards afore he could set eyes on me without screechin'. An' to think of his forgetting all that now! What's the use of a man living in the same town all his life, if those as has known him from the first wont speak a word for him when need be?"

So now, when Mr. Tozer saw the fellow-townsmen who, in his opinion, had so shamefully neglected their duty by him, he resolved to punish them to some extent by giving them at least a thorough good frightening. Accordingly he persisted in his clamorous demands for charity,

and finding they were not attended to—all the effect they produced being to cause the doctor and the lawyer to hurry on the faster—he changed his tone, and began insisting on some thing being given him as a recompense for hi undeserved sufferings.

"A twelvemonth in prizun, an' never a frient to say a good word for me to keep me out of it, he began. "People can lie hard enough when it suits their own turn, an' hoodwink an' bam boozle the justices fast enough when they wan to get costs from a poor fellow as has just been tellin' his neighbour a bit of his mind; but when it's to help a decent man as they've known since he was a babby, they wont move a finger to saw him. The least you can do, gentlemen, afte takin' away my character by lettin' me be sen to prizun and breakin' up my home, is to giv me a pound or two to start with. I'll call my mate, who isn't far off, and see what he says to it.

Mr. Tozer retreated a few steps and looke back for Mr. Tuck; but not seeing him, muttered "Can't have got over the hedge yet; what keep him loiterin' like this?"

He sprang across himself, and emitted a low shrill whistle as a summons to Mr. Tuck, who had just pulled on his boot. The doctor and Mr. Brown looked at each other as they hear the whistle, and felt they were doomed men unless they sought safety in flight. Let his corn twinge as it might, Mr. Brown felt that he must run for very life. If they could only reach little Jack and his party there might be safety for them. Off he and the doctor started; and Tozer, hearing their footsteps, shouted after them, "Hallo! stop there, I tell ye; you and I haven't squared matters yet."

This only added wings to the feet of the terrified ones, especially as when they attained the summit of the road, which was rather a steep slope just there, they saw no signs of their fellow-passengers. On they ran till they passed a shed, the last of the outhouses belonging to a farm. A bright idea seized the doctor, and he pushed the door of the shed. It was not fastened, and thinking he had found a place of refuge he rushed in, followed by his companion; and closing the door, which opened inwards, the two leant their backs against it to oppose the entrance of Tozer in case he attempted to force one.

Nothing, however, was further from that worthy's thoughts than the doing so. Tuck and he ran on after the fugitives, and not seeing them when they, too, were at the highest point of the road, guessed where they had taken refuge. They came softly to the door of the shed, and

listening attentively outside, were soon satisfied that the quick, heavy breathings they heard were not emitted by any cow or horse that might be inside. Tozer grinned with delight. He saw a way here of inflicting a little very appropriate retribution. Why should not those who had with such indifference witnessed his going to prison endure a little confinement themselves? The shed had a fastening outside, but the padlock which should have secured it was gone, the key having been lost, and the labourer who ought to have secured the shed and its occupant long before this, being at the present time idling at the smithy under pretence of fitting it with another. But the chain and hasp remained, and Mr. Tozer, looking round, was not long in finding a flint that, tightly wedged in the latter, would prevent the unfortunates inside the shed from letting themselves out, as well as the padlock could have done. He fitted this in as silently as possible, and then Mr. Tuck and he ran off, feeling anxious to secure their own night's lodging, and quite satisfied with the one they had procured for Mr. Brown and the doctor.





CHAPTER XXII.

A PLEASANT CHRISTMAS-EVE—WHERE THE DOCTOR AND LAWYER WERE FOUND ON CHRISTMAS MORNING.

R. GARLAND and his party were hidden from the sight of the terrified fugitives who were looking so eagerly for them, by a slight bend of the road, in the centre of which was a stile, and standing by this stile any one could obtain a view of Bridgetown, which in the distance, with its twinkling lights, looked pretty enough in the clear frosty air. Cold as it was, and eager as they were to reach Bridgetown, the two boys took Mr. Garland to this spot, and showed him the town in the distance, trying to find out the different houses and show him, while little Jack, who was too small to see much without being held up, was lifted in Tom's arms to take a look at the town too.

This delay caused them to be soon overtaken by Mr. Tozer and his friend, and as neither Mr. Garland nor Jack were very fast walkers, they soon outstripped them, and arrived at Keyhol Freehold some seconds before they did. M. Tozer was in a hurry to see his wife—at leas to get to his home, and was rather surprise when on knocking with his knuckles at the doo and demanding admittance as the master of th house, she put her head out of window, an flatly refused to let him in.

It was just at this moment that Mr. Garlan and the boys came up. That gentleman ha heard the story of Keyhole Freehold from Dicl and looked with a little interest on the strang old place which gave so curious a right ownership to its tenants; and he stopped to loo at the tumble-down old pile, which appeared le sordidly wretched in the moonlight. Mr. Tozand his friend stood in the small ill-kept plot oground before the house, and the former wanow indignantly exclaiming—

"Not let me in, Bet! Why, th' house is min an' all that's in it. I'll kick the door down if 3 doan't. Just see if I woant."

"Then I'll ha' ye taken to the lock-up, see I doan't," said Mrs. Tozer. "Get away, mar how dare ye come here, breaking into a qui woman's house? The place is mine, an' none yours. I'se got the key, an' the house is min an' if ye only dare to set foot over the place, I

tell my lodgers—an' there's two of 'em, stout, strong fellows—to turn ye out neck an' heels, an' give ye to the constables for forcin' your way in a place where you've no business to."

Mr. Tozer looked in amaze at his friend. "If this isn't pretty behaviour!" he said, at length; "here's a man's own wife keeping him out of his own house! Did any one ever hear the like o' that?"

"A man's own wife, indeed!" cried Mrs. Tozer, contemptuously. "It's a deal you thought o' your wife when you were gallivanting all over the country, an' leavin' her to fend an' find as she could for herself. An' as to its being your house, what right have you to it, any more nor any one else? You haven't the key, an' who ever heard of a house in Keyhole Freehold belongin' to any one but them as had?"

Mr. Tozer felt nonplussed. He could but feel that his wife's logic was sound. The possession of the key had constituted his own right to the cottage, and of course it now formed hers. Mrs. Tozer continued from the window—

"A fine time I've had of it while you've been away. I've had the rheumatics that bad I haven't been able to lift my hand to my head, an' that good-for-nothing doctor has never set his foot in the place. Of course, when a woman's

own husband neglects her, it isn't likely the anybody else 'ud take the trouble to see affer. I haven't had a drop of physic for semonths, at least; an' the last I had, I had beg an' pray for, an' send agin an' agin afore could get it—an' find my own bottles into the bargain, which is a thing I never had to ce when you was in the way to look after m Tozer."

Mrs. Tozer seemed affected, to judge by the sound of her voice. The recollection of her wrongs appeared too much for her. Mr. Toze thought this a good opportunity to strike in.

"If I didn't guess as much, Bet! if I didn think he'd neglect you when I wasn't in the wa to look after him! An' isn't it that that's brough me home! an' haven't I punished him alread for it? I've got him safe, Bet, in a pleasan place to spend his Christmas-eve; listen, Be an' I'll tell you how I've served the fellow out. And going close to the window Mr. Tozer, in few words, so low that they were inaudible t either Mr. Garland, Tom, or Dick, told his wif how he had served out the lawyer and the doctor Little Jack heard them though, for he had crep through one of the gaps in the paling, and listened, unobserved, to what Mr. Tozer wa narrating. Then he went back to the others

who were standing on the other side of the road, concealed from Mr. Tozer's view by the shadow of the trees above them, and only expressed his delight at what he had heard by a few quiet chuckles. Mrs. Tozer seemed equally gratified with her husband's story, but she still demurred about letting him in.

"I wouldn't mind so much if you'd come by yourself," she said, "but there's that fellow with you who was the first that led you into evil courses. Afore you knew him, Tozer, you was allers content with bringing home a hare or two, or maybe a fowl now and then. You was a quiet, respectable man, an' 'ud no more ha' thought o' breaking into a house than I should of killing a babby. No, no, Tozer, stick to the mate you've chosen, an' go away, an' let your wife be."

Mrs. Tozer withdrew from the window, and appeared about to close it, when Mr. Garland, who had been very much amused by the whole conversation, stepped forward, and touching his hat said, with the utmost politeness, "Pray, madam, don't leave the window without giving me an opportunity of trying to arrange this little matter between yourself and the good gentleman here."

Mrs. Tozer leaned eagerly out of the window. She had never been called "madam" in her life, and she was curious to see who it was that ad-

dressed her with such courtesy. Mr. Garland continued: - "A little concession on each side appears to be all that is wanting. You have the key, which gives you in a manner the right of ownership to the house, and to allow who you will to enter it; but on the other hand, Mr. Tozer is evidently anxious and eager to enjoy the society of his wife; and, madam, you have no right to debar him from that privilege. I speak as a lawyer-a London lawyer, madam," added Mr. Garland, emphatically; "and I say, that where the wife dwells the husband has a right to enter. Can't we settle it like this:—Mr. Tozer will agree to relinquish the society of his friend here, who, I am sure, would be sorry to cause a difference between man and wife; he will also agree to leave the hazardous employment of housebreaking, and return to the more peaceable pursuits in which he formerly engaged, and Mrs. Tozer will come down at once, and allow him to peaceably enter the house of which she is at present owner"

A great part of Mr. Garland's harangue was unintelligible to Mrs. Tozer, but she gathered its general purport, and was much flattered by a "London lawyer" styling her "madam." After making Mr. Tozer promise better behaviour for the future, and stipulating that Tuck was not to

enter the house at all, she came down and let him in, when the first thing Mr. Tozer did was to put the house-key in his pocket, and exclaim, "Now, old woman, I'm master of my own house again."

Mr. Garland and the boys were soon in Bridgetown, and on arriving at the Blue Boar, where the coach had been expected, they found quite a large party awaiting them. Mr. Wilkins was there, Harry Swain, and a number of Tom's and Dick's old companions. They led them off in triumph to Seth Wilkins's house, which was a little way out of the further end of the town. Mr. Garland ordered supper at the Blue Boar, and went early to bed, as he felt very tired, and neither he, Tom, nor Dick gave their late fellowpassengers a thought. As to little Jack, he forgot all about them too for a while, his head being completely turned by the reception he received. Harry Swain put him up on his shoulder, and carried him through the town that way, Jack nodding and smiling on the road to every one he met. No prince ever felt more important than Jack, or prouder of his robes than the small one did of his good great-coat and smart cap, so different from the garments in which he had left Bridgetown. They met the Rector soon, and he shook hands with Tom and Dick, patted Jack on the cheek, and told him he was growing quite a fine fellow, and that he should expect to see them all at church to-morrow. As to Mrs. Wilkins, she kissed Jack again and again, and almost cried over him; then she told Dick and Tom they had grown so she should hardly have known them, and then led them into her bright little parlour, where the cloth was laid for supper, and Mr. Dennes waiting to see them. They had so much to tell and to hear, Mrs. Wilkins was so full of admiration of their London-made clothes and their improved looks, and they were so much impressed with the smartness of the little parlour and its new furniture—Seth Wilkins had never had a parlour while in business; he said the times were too hard to allow of it—and the mince pies were so good, and the punch, which Mr. Wilkins brewed as an especial treat, so exhilarating, that Jack forgot all about his uncles; and at last, fairly overcome with fatigue, delight, and the supper he had eaten, slipped off his chair, and was picked up fast asleep from under the table. Tom carried him upstairs and put him to bed, and Dick and he soon went too, feeling almost as tired as little Tack, who never woke till nearly eight o'clock the next morning, when his first words were, as some of the events of the previous night rushed

into his recollection, "I wonder whether those two have got out of the cow-house yet?"

"The cow-house, Peculiar? What cow-house are you talking of?" said Tom. "You ain't awake yet, young one."

"Yes, I am," replied Jack, "and it's Uncle Jefferies and Uncle Brown that have been shut in the cow-house. I heard Tozer telling her all about it last night. They ran in to get away from him, and he fastened them in with a stone. If nobody's gone that way they must be there still. I should think they must have found it cold," added Jack, reflectively.

"Cold!—they must be nigh frozen," cried Tom.
"Why didn't you tell us of this before, Jack?"

"Because I never thought of it," replied Jack.
"What are you getting up in such a hurry for,
Tom?"

"Why, to let them out, to be sure," cried Tom.
"They'll be perished if we don't look sharp.
Dick, will you come too?"

"Yes; I should like to see how they look after their night's lodging," said Dick. "What a famous Christmas-eve they must have had, to be sure! But I say, Tom, I'd call on parson as we go. As likely as not if we don't those old fogies will say we shut them in, and make some mis-

chief to spoil our Christmas. I don't know but what if we were wise we should do better to leave them where they are."

But Tom could not agree to this. However, he thought it would be as well to call and tell the parson, in case either the doctor or Mr. Brown should think fit to tax Dick and him with a share in the trick played on them. Leaving Jack to account for their absence to Mr. Wilkins and "the mistress," they ran off, and knocking at Mr. Trevor's door, were shown at once into the diningroom, where they found him in conversation with Mrs. General.

She was so pleased to see them that she forgot for a short time the object of her visit; but having shaken hands with both, and told them they looked all the better for having been to London, she went on with what she had been saying to Mr. Trevor when they came in.

"The two silly shiftless creatures are at their wit's end. Mrs. Jefferies sent for me at six o'clock this morning to tell me her husband had not returned last night, and while she was crying and wringing her hands, Mrs. Brown came in a state almost of distraction to see her sister, and I found Mr. Brown had not returned home either. I sent Fred down to the Blue Boar to inquire if they had heard anything of the two gentlemen when the

coach changed horses, but all they could say was that no passengers got down there, as they had all got out when the horse fell down, with the intention of proceeding to Bridgetown, for which they were booked."

A loud knock was heard at the door while Mrs. General was speaking, and almost before she had concluded a servant brought in Mr. Garland's card, which was promptly followed by the entrance of that gentleman himself. Addressing himself to the parson, he said—

"I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to the Reverend Laurence Trevor, a magistrate as well as the rector of this parish?"

Mr.Trevor bowed, and Mr.Garland continued—
"I have just heard that two of my fellow passengers by the Express, who alighted at the same time as myself with the intention of walk-

ing on to Bridgetown, have been missing."

"It's all right, sir," cried Dick; "Tom and I have just come to tell parson where they are, Little Jack's just been telling us that Tozer shut them up in a cow-house where they had run and hidden themselves, because he had made believe he was going to rob them." Then he told the story as Tom and he had heard it from Jack, at which Mrs. General laughed till she cried, and the parson almost roared. Presently, however,

he recollected himself, and said, looking as sternly as he could under the circumstances—

"Mr. Tozer has made a good beginning as soon as he has returned home. Well, my boys, I think the sooner we let these unfortunate gentlemen out the better. Shall you know the shed?"

"We only passed one from the time we got out till we reached Keyhole Freehold," said Tom, "so there can't be any mistake about it; and now I think of it, I heard a cow bellowing as if she had lost her calf as we came by. I remember saying so to Dick."

"Then if that was the case they've had a pleasant night," observed Mrs. General. "Mr. Trevor, if you're going with these boys, I think I'll come too. I should like to see how Dr. Jefferies looks after being shut up for a night with a wild cow!"

"So should I," said Mr. Garland; "and if you have no objection, madam, I will accompany you and Mr. Trevor."

The parson despatched a message to Mrs. Jefferies to say that he thought it would not be long before she saw her husband; and then Mrs. General and he, Mr. Garland and the boys, started off for the cow-shed.

Dr. Jefferies and his brother-in-law had had a

terrible night. The only other occupant of the shed beside themselves was a cow, who, as Tom thought, had recently lost her calf. The poor creature was half desperate, and in a humour to turn on every one who came in her way, as if they were all participants in the crime of robbing her of her offspring. Mr. Brown and the doctor had been too engrossed by their fears of Mr. Tozer to pay much attention to her at first, but she soon made them unpleasantly aware of her presence—bellowing at them, and advancing towards them with lowered head and dangerouslooking horns, till they thought they would sooner risk meeting Mr. Tozer than stay in the shed to be gored or trampled to death by a mad cow. They tried to open the door, but in vain, Mr. Tozer had secured it very firmly; they were in agonies of fright, and knew not what to do. The moon shone full through a small window above the door, and they could see that the cow looked furious, while her bellowings became more threatening than ever. Some way above the manger was an immense oaken hay-rack. It struck the doctor if he could only get up here, he should be safe from the cow for awhile. He rushed behind her, put his foot on the manger and swung himself up by his arms into the hay-rack, dislodging a number of fowls who had thought fit to roost here. They flew out, indignantly clucking an crowing, some striking him on the face with the wings, others flying at Mr. Brown, who remaine below, with his back to the door and his face t the cow, who looked at him as if she mean mischief.

She was quiet now, but there was such a mean ing in her eye that Mr. Brown's heart failed withi him. He tried to get past her in the hope tha he might obtain the same place of refuge as th doctor had done, but the cow came closer to him and in a paroxysm of fright he fell down on hi knees, and lifting up his hands cried, "I'm doomed man!—I shall never leave this plac alive!"

The doctor thought so too, and congratulate himself on his own comparative safety; but presently Mr. Brown saw a gleam of hope and rushe between the cow's legs; then springing on hi feet tried to make way to the hay-rack, but th cow had no notion of letting him off so easily. She turned round and ran after him, and the she being a very roomy one, there was plenty a space for her to chase Mr. Brown in. The fowly more irritated than ever, flew both in his face and the cow's, adding their voices to her bellowing till the uproar was almost deafening.

"She'll have him!" thought the doctor; "

don't see any chance for him. I wonder if he's made his will."

But Mr. Brown was too quick for the cow. He gave one leap and was soon trying to push his way into the hay-rack, in spite of Dr. Jefferies' remonstrances that though it would bear one, it would not two, and that his additional weight would certainly pull it down. But the hay-rack though roughly was strongly built, and Mr. Brown found safety there as well as his brother-in-law. It was a very uncomfortable perch certainly, and they got terribly cramped before the morning, while the cow kept them in fear by pulling at the hay which hung down, and now and then lifting up her head towards them and emitting an accusatory bellow. There is no knowing how long they might have remained here had not little Jack thought of them, for Dick Giles, the farmlabourer, who had the charge of the cow, not only forgot to come back with the padlock when he had fitted the key to it, but partly in honour of Christmas-day and partly in consequence of the manner in which he had kept Christmas-eve, lay in bed till some hours after he should have attended to the cow. Their plight was truly pitiable when Tom removed the stone from the door and opened it; but even he shrank back from entering at first, for the cow looked

very evilly at him, and emitted a portentous bellow.

"Is she safe?" asked Mrs. General, anxiously. "Now, Tom, don't go and get tossed, for she's a terrible looking creature."

Luckily it had occurred to Tom, when Mrs. General spoke of the cow, that a halter or a rope with a noose might be convenient, and he had obtained the latter article from the parson's man-servant. He saw at once what was amiss with the cow, and going quietly up, threw the noose over her head, drew it tight, and then speaking soothingly to her, tried to persuade Madame Vache to walk out and give place to her visitors.

"Take her out! take her out! and shoot her, horrid wretch!" cried the doctor and the lawyer from the hay-rack, and then the parson, Mrs. General, and the rest looked up and saw their scared faces looking from amidst the hay. Mrs. General shrieked with laughter, Mr. Garland and the parson were equally overcome, and as to Dick, he sat down, though he had his best clothes on, on the gravel footway, and laughed till the tears ran down his face, gasping out at intervals, "If it wasn't worth while coming from London on purpose to see this! I'd have walked the distance rather than have lost it."

But the doctor and Mr. Brown were in no humour for mirth. Indeed they were highly indignant that any one else should be so. They expostulated, and scolded, and implored to be released from their very unpleasant position, which, of course, as long as the cow was in the way, was not a very easy matter. Tom and she were the quietest parties present. She looked at him as if to ask if he was really in earnest, and he looked back again in a manner that informed her he was. At last the cow thought it best to yield the point, and quietly allowed Tom to lead her out, when the parson and Mr. Garland entered the shed, and with the utmost politeness assisted the unfortunate gentlemen down from the hay-rack. They were not in a very fit trim to walk back to the town, especially Mr. Brown, who bore evident marks of his progress over the cow-house floor. But there was no help for it, and with very dismal faces they found their way home, where they undressed and went to bed, giving strict orders not to be called till it was dinner-time.

"I can't go and see my patients till the afternoon," said Dr. Jefferies. "Patients, indeed! I think I want a doctor myself. I never spent such an awful night in all my life, and it will be many a day before I get over it."

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The parson asked Mr. Garland to breakfast with him, which that gentleman was very ready to do, and equally ready to accept Mrs. General's invitation to dine with her and a few friends, of whom Mr. Trevor was one, and, on the whole, enjoyed himself in their society so well, that he began to feel quite grateful to Mr. Quarle for summoning him to Bridgetown at Christmas time.





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHRISTMAS DAY AT BRIDGETOWN—THE FIRE—
HOW TOM DUNSTONE KEPT HIS WORD.

AVING secured the cow again in her shed, Tom and Dick ran back to Mr. Wilkins's, where they found breakfast ready, and Jack entertaining Mrs. Wilkins with sundry speculations as to whether the cold in the night had been sharp enough to freeze his uncles stiff; and if so, what would be the best way of thawing them again. He was delighted when he heard Dick's account of the manner in which they had been imprisoned in the hay-rack, and capered about in his chair till he upset his coffee, when a mild reprimand from Mrs. Wilkins, pointing out how he had stained her clean cloth, recalled him to more orderly behaviour. It was a glorious Christmas morning, with the air so clear and frosty, the hedges lightly silvered over, and here and there in the distance the snow, which had not melted from the last fall, lying in patches of white under the hedges. Mrs. Wilkins had decorated her house with holly, and had it cleaned up thoroughly in honour of the occasion, so that everything in it looked sprucer and brighter even than ever. After breakfast she took them over the house, which was a very cosy little place, with plenty of good substantial furniture in it. Then Seth Wilkins showed them over the garden, and the small farmyard, where every one of the fowls knew him, and each had its distinctive name. There was the pigsty, too. where a pig had just been put up to fatten in place of the one that had been slaughtered to make Christmas cheer, and with a melancholy satisfaction Mr. Wilkins pointed out to the boys that the pig took to its food kindly, and seemed likely to do well upon it.

"Though there's a deal of loss in one's own pork," he said, with a mournful sigh; "and as to poultry, I don't suppose there's an egg ever laid costs me less than sixpence. Fowls seem to think they come into the world for nothing but eating. The expense I'm at in this place is frightful. I tell Mrs. Wilkins I'm losing by it every day."

As all his losses never made Mr. Wilkins any poorer, the boys were not much affected by this

recital of grievances. It was now time to get ready for church, there being no service at the chapel, and the boys soon started off, glad to see their old friend the parson in the pulpit, and to look round on so many well-remembered faces.

The church was decorated with holly in the old-fashioned style, wreaths twisted round the pillars, and hung from the beams. No gumming of leaves, or monograms of berries; they did things in a much simpler style at Bridgetown sixty years ago; there was no organ, but a few wind instruments, not too well played, served instead, and the boys of the charity school sang heartily at the top of their voices, seeming to think that what they wanted in sweetness and skill they would make up in strength. But it was a joyful service to Dick and Tom, for all these drawbacks—a service in which they could join heartily as one of thanksgiving and praise for the protection that had been over them, and the mercies vouchsafed since they had left Bridgetown last.

The parson's sermon, too, was a good one. It always was when he took a plain text from the Bible, and spoke a few plain words from it, instead of bewildering his hearers with quotations from the Fathers, or other wise men of

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whom they knew nothing. It was short, too, as a sermon should be on Christmas-day, and simple and straightforward, just as he might have given a little kindly counsel to his parishioners in their own homes; and when it was over he came out and shook hands with his people, asking after one or the other who might be absent, and sending friendly messages to those whom indisposition or other causes had compelled to stop away.

Of course neither Dr. Jefferies nor Mr. Brown was at church, and as to their wives they were staying at home to take care of them; but Mrs. Preston was there, looking very sad and quiet in her widow's weeds, and Tom and Dick went up to her and thanked her very warmly for the kindness she had shown them. She was quite pleased to see them looking so well and strong, and told them to be sure and come the next day to see her; then she kissed little Jack, and Mrs. General just then coming up, complimented him on the way he had grown, and his good looks and smart clothes. Of course she gave the boys an invitation too, telling them they must all come to tea with her the day after they had been to Mrs. Preston's. Then Harry Swain and one or two of the other boys came up, and they all walked on together. They came up

with old Quarle before long; he was crawling along in the frosty sunshine, looking more pinched and feeble than ever. Shock was with him, and Shock was evidently aging too; but both the dog and his master were glad to see Tom, and the old man, smiling faintly, said—

"So you've come to see us all again, Tom."

"Yes, sir," said Tom, "and very glad to do it, too. Mrs. Preston was good enough to say she'd pay our coach fare, so here we are. Well, Shock, so you know me, old fellow. I never knew a dog with such a memory."

"Yes. Shock remembers his friends, and so does his master." said Ouarle. "You saved his life. Tom, and neither he nor I have forgotten it, or other things beside."

"Well, you've paid me for them very well, sir," said Tom, laughing, "so please don't say any more about it. Come on, Dick, or we shall be too late for dinner."

The old man looked after the boys sadly. struck painfully, perhaps, by the contrast between their high spirits and elation and his own dreariness. "No one but Shock-no one but Shock," he murmured. "Well, come on, old dog, and let us eat our Christmas dinner once more together."

The minister dined at Mrs. Wilkins's that day.

It was a capital dinner, too, all from the fi yard, fowls and pork of Mrs. Wilkins's fattening, and a pudding that made Jack si with delight, he declared it was "such a wop!

"I made it big," said the mistress, "that boys might take a good share of it back v you go, and I thought little Jack here sh take a slice to Mr. Quarle to-morrow. I c suppose the poor old soul has had the hear mix one for himself."

"I'll go with Jack when he takes it," Tom, looking as if Mrs. Wilkins had conferr personal kindness on himself. He had thou very kindly the last year of Mr. Quarle to v he had previously done, and felt pleased at opportunity of showing the old man a l attention.

The day was a quiet, but a very happy The old minister asked the boys how diffe places were looking in London, and gave tl reminiscences of his one visit there thirty y before. Then Mrs. Wilkins told them storie her own early days, and Mr. Wilkins san song in a manner so excruciatingly melanch that little Jack stared at him open mouthed great doubt as to whether propriety requirements that little Jack stared at him open mouthed great doubt as to whether propriety requirements that little Jack stared at him open mouthed great doubt as to whether propriety requirements that little Jack stared at him open mouthed great doubt as to whether propriety requirements at the laugh or to cry. But there was no quality to the look of the loo

his comic song, which he had been practising for this occasion the last two months, and then Tom gave "Tom Bowling," and other ditties of Dibdin, in capital style. "Tom Bowling" was always a favourite of his, as he was of most hearty English boys at that time.

So the day wore on, and at last the old minister, having offered up prayers, took his leave, and before long every one in Seth Wilkins's quiet household was asleep, calmly, peacefully asleep; little dreaming of what the wakening would be from that slumber.

Such a wakening! they never forgot it. Cries of "Fire! fire!" resounding through the air; men hurrying past the quiet homestead and hoarsely talking to each other. Where—where was it? Tom sprang on his feet, awake in an instant, his first thought for little Jack, who was sitting upright in bed, looking wonderingly around him. It was not here, so Jack and all in the master's house were safe; and then Tom ran to the window, and throwing back the white curtains looked out, and then started back appalled.

The sky was red with the lurid reflection of the flame, and in the distance Tom could see above the houses of the town tongues of flame shooting upwards. They appeared to rise from the street in which Quarle's house was situated—perhaps from that very house. Tom shuddered; Quarle was so old and helpless, he might die before help could reach him. Few would care to run much risk to save so unpopular a character as the miser, and if the flames were high he might be left to perish in them with his dog.

"Not if I can help it," said Tom, dressing himself as he spoke, while Dick, who had sprung out of bed when he did so, began doing the same, observing, "If you're off to see the fun, Tom, so am I."

Seth Wilkins too appeared to be moving; indeed he had been aroused at the same time as the boys, and was dressing himself with a mournful alacrity, observing to his wife, "I'll go and see whose house it is that's on fire; perhaps some poor creatures may want a home before the night's out, and if they do, why, I suppose, Rebecca, we must do our part by them as well as we can."

"To be sure," said his wife, cheerily; "and be thankful we've got it to do with. I'll get up and light a good fire in the kitchen, and have the kettle boiling in case you bring any one home. A cup of tea's a wonderful comfort if one's called up unexpected in the night."

SethWilkinsthought in his own mind that a cup of tea would not be much comfort to him if he were called up through his house being burned over his head; but he left his wife to make what preparations her kind heart prompted her to for any poor houseless creatures he might bring home, and, hastening downstairs, was just unfastening the door when he saw Tom and Dick coming down the stairs.

"We're going too, master," said Tom, "to see if we can't lend a hand in putting the fire out. I doubt it's Quarle's house, and I think folks wont be so ready to help him as they might others."

"Boys like you would be better in your beds," said Mr. Wilkins. "I don't know though—come along — it's right for us all to do what we can."

They hurried on towards the town, and then through the streets, which were now alive with people hastening towards the fire. They heard the rumble of the parish engine—a heavy, lumbering thing, which had not been in use for years, and was by no means in such good order as it should be. There had been some delay in getting the water; for, of course, in a small town like Bridgetown, sixty years ago, it was not laid on, and the pond to which they had had recourse was frozen all over the surface. But on came the engine now, with men shouting and boys hurraing, and Seth Wilkins and the boys ran on by its side, and, stopping when the engine did, found

that the fire was, as Tom had instinctively guessed, at old Quarle's.

No one ever knew how it had arisen—the old man himself could nevertell. Whether a spark had flown unnoticed from his wood fire on the dry old flooring near it, and smouldered and burned unseen till it had attained strength and power sufficient to burst forth in all its fury, and taunt the poor helpless occupant of the house with his impotence to check it, none could say. Let it have arisen as it might, there it was now, a terrible and fearful thing, grand with a fiend-like beauty as it towered above the living, surging mass below, as if to laugh at the utter vainness of their attempts to quell it.

The water played, but without any effect, upon the flames. Tom looked anxiously about in the crowd. Was Quarle there, looking on at the ruin of his house, or was he—was he in it still!

A cry, a sharp, terrible cry from one of the upper rooms of the house answered Tom's question. He looked up, and saw by the light of the flames the figure of the old man waving his hands and shrieking and crying for help—for the help that all around seemed to shrink from giving.

He had been awakened by his dog's howling.

Shock had become aware of the danger, and did his best to rouse his master to a sense of it. Ouarle heard the crackling of wood, and smelled that something was burning. But his predominant passion—avarice—which had been the bane of his life and made him an outcast from his kind, now seemed likely to bring death, and a terrible one, upon him. Instead of thinking how best to insure his safety, he began hastily securing whatever money he had in the house about him, and filling his pockets with different documents which might be worth much gold, but were scarcely worth a human life. Then he began to think of escape; but the flames had made rapid progress, were fast coming up the stairs, and gaining on and hemming him in on every side. No hope—no hope. He ran to and fro in his agony, but there was no outlet-none! He rushed to one of the windows and looked down on the living mass below. There they were—there—all those living human faces. Was there not one amongst them who would give him help? Couldn't they raise a ladder against the house? Why had they not thought of it before? Oh! they were cruelcruel, hard, and pitiless! They had come there as to a show, to please their eyes with seeing his house burned and himself destroyed! They were not human beings, but demons gloating over his agonies. No!—they were bringing a ladder; but it was too short—it would never reach the window where he was! They were splicing another on to it—quick!—quick!—the flames were gaining on him, and the smoke stifling his breath! He looked again despairingly on the crowd below, and saw'a boyish face—boyish, but strong and brave, and looking like an angel's with the tender pity in its eyes, and then the old man felt a gleam of hope, and sent forth a wild - cry—"Tom!"

Then he fell back dazed and stupefied, and a shudder ran through the crowd, as men said one to another, "It's too late now, he can't save himself by the ladder, and who will go inside to fetch him out!"

"Put up the ladder—quick!" cried a clear, loud voice; and the men instinctively placed it against the window where Quarle had just been standing. "Hold it fast," cried the same tones, and in a second Tom Dunstone was seen flying up the ladder.

"Come back, lad! come back!" cried many voices; "you'll kill yourself, and can't save him by rushing in the fire."

Women cried and wrung their hands,—"The brave boy! the noble boy! to dare his death like that! Better such as Quarle should perish a

thousand times than Tom lose his life in trying to save him." And they called on Tom to come back—back from what would be certain death.

But on Tom went; he heard nothing, saw nothing, but the helpless human creature who had called on him in his agony. Up! up! though the flames shot out their fiery tongues from the burning house, and scorched his face and singed his hair. Up! up! through the heat and the smoke till he leaped into the room where Quarle lay stupefied upon the ground, with his dog moaning helplessly by him.

Tom raised the old man in his arms, and dragged him to the window. He was thin and spare, and Tom strong for his age; besides, the circumstances gave him a strange force and power. Shock looked at Tom with great, sad, wistful eyes. Was he to perish there?

Tom understood and answered him. "Keep by the window, Shock, and I'll come back for you." Shock seemed satisfied, and waited by the open window as if in calm reliance on Tom's word. Then Tom descended the ladder, placing Quarle before him, and so sliding down. They reached the bottom, and Tom heard a loud hurrah from the crowd below, and, leaving Quarle, he was about to rush up the ladder again, when Seth Wilkins stepped forward and laid hold of him.

"Not again, Tom, my boy! It's tempting Providence."

"I've promised!" cried Tom; "I've promised the dog to go back for him!" and shaking off his old master's hand he tore up the ladder, and in another minute was seen descending with Shock in his arms.

The shout that rent the air! It was as if every man in all that crowd had but one heart and one voice with which to give its feelings vent. Only the women cried and sobbed, and one was heard to say, "If his mother could be living now to see him!"

But the flames from the house were terrible, and, as if angry with Tom for snatching their prey from them, they sent out their cloven tongues and caught the ropes that bound the ladder together, caught and singed them, so that when Tom was on the lower rungs of the upper ladder they gave way beneath him, and he fell heavily down on the pavement beneath.

Then there was a cry of horror, and women crowding and sobbing passionately, as if weeping over their own dead, and strong men gasping with terror, lest the brave boy who had shamed them all should never live to know how they esteemed him, and above all the voice of Mrs. Mauriel, who had come there with the

Rector, crying, as she bent over Tom, and kissed him, "Oh, Tom! Tom! the best and noblest boy in all the world, to die like this!"

And then she wept as none had ever seen her weep, but once when she stood by her dead husband's coffin.





CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH WE TAKE LEAVE OF THE GOOD FOLKS OF BRIDGETOWN, AND SAY FAREWELL TO THE SQUIRE OF PREST-HOPE.

UT Tom was not to die yet. There were many years of work and usefulness before him, though for days his life was despaired of by his friends. There were no limbs broken, but the shock to the whole system, caused by a fall from such a height, was very severe, and Tom lay in a helpless state, stunned, speechless, and unconscious of all around day after day, till Dick and Jack began to doubt whether he would ever speak again.

Mr. Wheatley attended him, and Dick and Mrs. Wilkins were his most assiduous nurses. Quarle came two or three times a day to see how he was progressing, and sometimes was allowed to go into the room where Tom was lying still and pale, with great wide open eyes that saw nothing. Shock would follow his master, and sit

down near the bed, looking wistfully at Tom; while Quarle would stand with his hands upon his stick, and his grey eyes bent upon the boy for whose life, miser as he was, I verily believe he would have given all his hoarded gold.

At last Mr. Wheatley spoke of hope, and then of certainty; Tom would recover—be well and strong in God's good time, with careful nursing and great care. Nursing! care!—would not the mistress give him these? and were not Mrs. General and Mrs. Preston only too glad to help her? Through all the town there was but one feeling with regard to Tom:—He was the best and bravest boy in all the wide West Country, and if he died it would be long enough before they had such another.

Prayers were put up for Tom in church and chapel, and Mr. Trevor called almost as often as the old minister to hear how he was progressing. Even Mr. Jefferies and Mr. Brown began to think they would have done much better not to have ignored their relationship to Tom, and the doctor went so far as to offer to attend him gratuitously. But, fortunately for Tom, Mr. Quarle rejected this offer: he had already told Mr. Wheatley that he might look to him for the settlement of his charges for Tom; and Mr. Wilkins was only too glad to have so good an excuse for declining the

doctor's offer. So Tom progressed slowly but surely, and at last, three weeks after the night of the fire, he was told that Mr. Garland, who had been obliged to go to town to attend to his business, had returned, and was coming to see him the next day.

"That's very good of him," said Tom to Dick. "I wonder whether, when he goes back, he would mind calling on Mr. Webb, and asking him to keep our places open for us a little longer? Or perhaps, Dick," he added sadly, "you'll go back and make sure of yours. I've no right to be keeping you here wasting your time, and there's no knowing when I shall be strong enough to work again."

"Don't trouble yourself about that," said Dick; "perhaps there isn't so much need to work as you think for. And I'm not going back to Mr. Webb's; I've written to tell him so. Mr. Quarle has got me a much better berth than I had there, at a large builder's in Bristol. I'm to have more money to begin with, and a good chance of pushing myself on, so as to be something better than a mere journeyman all my life. Mr. Garland's been telling me all about it. He stopped at Bristol, coming down, on purpose to settle everything. I've promised him to go to evening school regular, and to take lessons in architec-

tural drawing. Oh, you'll just see if I don't get on, Tom, and be somebody by-and-by. But I'm not to leave you till you're all right again. Quarle's positive about that, and so am I. Ah! he's not a bad sort, that old fellow, Tom, after all."

"No," said Tom, languidly; "I suppose there's more good in him than people think for. At any rate, I'm glad I saved him."

"You'll have no need to be sorry," said Dick, mysteriously. "But you're looking tired, and I'm talking away nincteen to the dozen. Let me cover you up, and do you go to sleep like a good fellow. I want you as well as can be to see Mr. Garland to-morrow."

So Tom closed his eyes and slept, without troubling himself as to the meaning of Dick's words; and the next morning when he was washed and tidied up, and had made his breakfast, Mrs. Wilkins told him a visitor had called to see him, and Mr. Garland came in.

It was the first time he had seen Mr. Garland since the last eventful Christmas-day, and it seemed such a long time since then. Such a long time since he, Tom, was hale and strong, and able to walk about and take care of himself, instead of lying here prone and helpless to be cared for by kind-hearted women as though he were a baby.

Mr. Garland spoke very kindly to him, and then, after a few remarks upon indifferent subjects, observed—

"Now, Tom, this is a business visit, and I come to you on the part of my client Mr. Quarle."

Tom stared; what had Mr. Quarle to do with him in a matter of business? But Mr. Garland proceeded:—

"I've brought a deed with me. I'm not going to ask you to read it, but I should just like to show it to you." He took it from the pocket of his great-coat, and unfolded it before Tom's eyes. Tom saw his own name—Thomas Dunstone—in large text letters two or three times, and he stared vacantly at the mass of writing before him, and then looked to Mr. Garland for an explanation.

"Tom," said that gentleman, "this piece of parchment does a great deal for you. It makes you Squire of Prest-hope, as your grandfather, and his father's fathers were before you. Mr. Quarle has given you this as an earnest of his gratitude to you for saving his life, and that of the only friend he has in all the world—his dog."

Tom flushed scarlet; the tears came in his eyes, and he trembled all over. He was very weak still, and easily agitated; then he stammered out—

"I can't take it, sir—it's too much. I couldn't let the old man die when he called on me to help him; and as to Shock, I was forced to go back to him, when I'd given him my word I would."

"It's not at all too much, Tom," said Mr. Garland, quietly. "Mr. Quarle is a rich man, though he gets little enjoyment from his money. He can well afford to give you this—ay! and even more; and I do not think you should grudge him the pleasure of doing so. You have no right, Tom, no right, my boy, to insist upon his remaining so much in your debt, without suffering him to make some recompense for the life you have given him. Mr. Quarle has been a hard man in his time, and done some pitiless things, but I believe, as far as your late father was concerned, he is heartily repentant; and I think, Tom, that needing, as we all do, forgiveness ourselves, it is time that you gave yours to him."

"It isn't that," cried Tom; "I've forgiven him long ago. I saw that he was sorry, and I felt I ought, at last. But this is too much for me to take—perhaps I ought to let him give me something if it will make him feel happier—but not this—all this—me, the Squire of Prest-hope—why, sir, what shall I do with myself, and with the land and all that it brings in?"

"I should have thought you would have known

a ready use for all that, Tom," said Mr. Garland. "I think Mr. Quarle is as yet the only one of your father's creditors you have paid off."

Tom flushed. "Yes, it would help me there, sir; but fancy me, the Squire—why, I'm no gentleman, to begin with."

"Not so great a disqualification for the part as you fancy, Tom," said Mr. Garland, smiling; "but I think myself you have as good a right to be styled a gentleman as any Preston of them But, though Mr. Quarle gives you the lands at once, with the dwelling-house and the old furniture in it, neither he nor I think it wise that you should enter at once into possession of them. The rents are to lie by for the next few years along with the profits from the home farm and orchards, and will be invested on your behalf till you are of an age to know what to do with them: and in the meanwhile I propose that you shall go first to an old friend of mine, who takes a few private pupils—lads about your own age; and when he has polished you a little, and given you as much knowledge of different matters as it is right the Squire of Prest-hope should know; and I dare say with hard work on your partwhich you are not the boy to flinch from—he will have done as much in a couple of years: then the next thing will be for you to become

pupil for another year to a gentleman farmer—one who thoroughly understands his business, and will teach you yours. You will be only nineteen then—a young Squire; but, neither Mr. Quarle nor I have any doubt, quite wise enough to fill the place with due propriety. And as to Prest-hope not being your due, why, Tom," added Mr. Garland, with sudden vehemence, striking the document he held as he spoke, "I consider you're as much entitled to it as I am to the twenty guineas I mean to charge Mr. Quarle for drawing up this deed."

Tom reflected a little, and then he said, "Well, sir, as you think it right I'll take it, and thank Mr. Quarle."

"That's a fine fellow!" said Mr. Garland. "There's one thing more he wished, but that is to be as you pleased. He would like you to take the name of Preston instead of the one you bear. What do you say, my boy? Will you be Preston of Presthope?"

"No, sir," replied Tom, "I'd rather keep my father's name. It was good enough for him and for many a Dunstone in the old farm-house before, and good enough for my mother to change her own for. Tell Mr. Quarle I thank him, but I'd rather not be the Squire if I can't be Tom Dunstone still."

"Then Tom Dunstone you shall be, and the Squire to boot," said Mr. Garland. "Mr. Quarle makes no point of your taking the name. And now, good-bye, my boy. I am off by the coach this evening, and shall not see you again till I call on you at my friend's to hear how you are getting on."

"Tell little Jack to come, sir, please," said Tom, as Mr. Garland took his leave.

Little Jack came, and nestled up to the bedside by Tom, who took his small hand in his, and stroked it fondly. "Jack! Jack! we shall have a home together at last. Oh! Jack! Jack! think of that!" then Tom fell into a long, deep sleep, from which he woke wonderfully strengthened and refreshed.

His recovery made rapid progress after this. Happiness is such a wonderful physician, and Tom was very happy now, with the prospect of a home for little Jack, and the means of paying all his father's creditors. He worked hard and steadily at his books for two years, and then as hard to acquire a thorough practical knowledge of farming. At the end of that time he came to Prest-hope, where little Jack and he made their home together, Mrs. Preston keeping it for them, till eight years later Tom brought a wife home to do so instead. But Mrs. Preston lived

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" His favourite of all was one called Lucy."-P. 389.

very near them, and after a time, when Jack started as doctor in the town, kept his house for many years, Jack never marrying, saying sometimes there was no woman in the world half so well worth loving as Tom; and as to children, hadn't Tom plenty for both of them? Jack makes a famous doctor, clever and kind, and very sparing of his physic; and though he has lately given the bulk of his practice up to one of his nephews, who is treading closely in his uncle's steps, still the townspeople think there is no one like the "old doctor." after all.

Mr. Quarle lived to an extreme old age. was a good thing for him that his house was burned down, for Mrs. Wilkins in a manner took possession of him, and persuaded him to live in a cottage adjoining their own, where she could go every day and look after him, and send in her little maid Mary with broom and pail occasionally. There was no resisting Mrs. Wilkins. Mr. Ouarle found himself obliged to live and dress a little more like other people, and insensibly he became weaned from the most repulsive of his habits, though he was always strange and peculiar. It was a great trouble to him when Shock died, but Tom's children, one after the other, comforted the old man. His favourite of all was one called Lucy-Lucy, after Tom's dear mother—another little Lucy growing up at Prest-hope, and sleeping in her happy girlhood in the little chamber over the porch which the last Lucy had inhabited. When old Quarle died, he did not do as many people had supposed he would, leave all his money to Tom. He knew him better, so he left the bulk of his wealth to different charitable institutions, fifty guineas to "Thomas Dunstone, Esq." for a mourning ring, and five thousand pounds as a marriage portion to his daughter Lucy.

And Lucy gave herself and her fortune to Dick's eldest son, a rising young architect and surveyor. For Dick had done as he had said, and become "somebody" too; and, as a builder on a large scale, with above a hundred men in his employ, was a person of no small importance in Bristol. Mrs. General Mauriel married the parson at It was said that the courtship had lasted for ten years; but at any rate, though they were each above fifty when they married, they lived more than twenty years very happily together. Mrs. Wilkins lived to see Tom's grandchildren, and was happy and peaceful and placid to the last. She had nursed her husband, the good old minister, and Mr. Quarle in their last illnesses, and at length she closed her own eyes, happy in the thought that she had lived to see the boys

to whom she had been as a mother, rich, prosperous, and *good* men, and happy, too, in the thought that her long day's work was over, and that she was to enter into her reward at last.

Ambrose Dunstone and his wife rejoiced greatly at Tom's prosperity, and when Tom came into his estate, he lost no time in presenting Ambrose with a good gold watch and Mrs. Ambrose with a silver teapot, as some acknowledgment of their kindness in giving little Jack and himself a home when they had no other; and to the day of her death Mrs. Ambrose, when at home, would never take tea but out of that teapot. She said it had quite a different flavour to that made in any other, and made the tea go half as far again; and when Ambrose and his wife could use the teapot and watch no longer themselves, they were severally solemnly bequeathed as a legacy and heirloom to Tom's eldest son and daughter, "so that," as Ambrose worded it, "they should never go out of the family."

Mrs. Jefferies and Mrs. Brown were genteel to the last, but their sons did not do very well. The last heard of Gussy, many years ago, was that he was croupier at one of the gambling tables at Baden-Baden; and Fred was killed in a fight in the diggings of California, after leading a wandering, disreputable life for years.

And as to Tom-my good, brave, honest Tom, whom I have learned to love, while writing of his boyish fortunes, almost as though he were one of the boys to whom night after night I have read his story—what shall I say of him? He is an old man now, old, grey-headed, yet erect as ever, with children's children round his knees. but with a heart as young and a soul as brave as when he first felt that he had to battle his way to win a home for little Jack, and clear his father's name. He is a loving husband, a fond father, and a generous master. He has never forgotten his own troubles, and the recollection has made him ever ready to help others in their up-hill path; and through all the country where his father's fathers dwelt for years, and where the Squires of Prest-hope lived for generations back, there has been no name more known and honoured far and wide than that of him who began his up-hill way as the carpenter's apprentice, TOM DUNSTONE.

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